THE MAGAZINE OF IDEAS FOR OPEN-MINDED REA

The Critic ©

January/February 2(
Issue 14 | £5.95 | thecr

POLITICS • OPIN
SOCIETY • REPO
LAW • ART • BOO
MUSIC • SCREEN
THEATRE • GOSS

No joke for the woke

Andrew Doyle: Titania McGrath has got me cancelled by the comedy club

Michael Collins: The BBC is a different class
Josephine Bartosch: Rise of the sex robots
Clive Aslet: Tate makes a meal of its mural

ISSN 2633-2655

The Critic

SAVE 66%

NEW YEAR SALE £10 FOR 5 ISSUES

scribe to *The Critic* today and
a huge 66% off the cover price!
5 issues of *The Critic*, Britain's
derful monthly current affairs
culture magazine, dedicated to
rous content and first-rate writing
d unafraid to ask the questions
ers won't. Subscribe now for
self or another, for just £10.

SUBSCRIBE TODAY AND YOU'LL GET:

- **FREE DELIVERY OF THE PRINT EDITIONS TO YOUR DOOR**
- **INSIGHTFUL WRITING**
- **SAVE A HUGE 66% ON THE SHOP PRICE**
- **NEVER MISS AN ISSUE**

O SUBSCRIBE VISIT **THECRITIC.IMBMSUBSCRIPTIONS.COM/SALE21**
OR CALL 01293 312250 QUOTING **SALE21**

CLOSING DATE FOR ORDERS IS 30TH APRIL 2021. THE PRICE SHOWN IS A UK DIRECT DEBIT OFFER. YOUR SUBSCRIPTION WILL BEGIN WITH THE NEXT ABLE ISSUE. ALL SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE FOR A 6 MONTH PERIOD. IF YOU DO NOT CANCEL AT THE END OF THAT PERIOD, THE SUBSCRIPTION WILL AUTO BY DIRECT DEBIT FOR 5 ISSUES AT £15. ALL SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE NON-REFUNDABLE. THIS IS A LIMITED OFFER AND MAY BE WITHDRAWN AT ANY TIME. PLEASE NOTE: BY SUBSCRIBING WE WILL CONTACT YOU ABOUT YOUR SUBSCRIPTION FROM TIME TO TIME. THE CRITIC IS PUBLISHED 10 TIMES A YEAR, WITH 2 DOUBLE ISSUES IN THE YEAR.

It's all a conspiracy

THERE IS A GREAT RESET. It has a website with a video introduction by HRH The Prince of Wales. Sponsored by the World Economic Forum, it's the Davos view on how the world might grow sustainably after the recession wrought by Covid. It is as worthy, dull and platitudinous as you might expect. But unless all the fanfare is a cunning plan to hide it in plain sight, it is very far from a conspiracy. Yet a small minority of noisy voices insists otherwise, erecting lurid theories about what the lizards are up to. Or perhaps those voices are, in turn, well-funded *agents provocateurs*, working to the agenda of foreign governments, whose purpose is to discredit and drown out more sensible voices. They do so in order to — well, what?

These ways of explaining the world achieve something truly remarkable — they eat themselves, yet thrive on the diet. They seem more prevalent than ever — but what form of modernity does the conspiracy theory assume? It is a form that has scarcely adapted since subjected to the diagnosis of the historian Richard Hofstadter in his 1964 essay, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*. Unseemly, unlettered people expressed political opinions outside the acceptable range, their villainy self-evident from the populist manner of their doing so.

They did not know what they were talking about; they projected their ignorant fears onto the reasonable, mature section of the political community; and they needed to do this to validate, and compensate for, their own myriad, unworthy anxieties.

Such was the age of Barry Goldwater. Let us take a brief tour d'horizon of contemporary, transatlantic sophistication.

Vladimir Putin stole the 2016 US presidential election with a "Manchurian Candidate". Donald Trump was compromised by Moscow hotel bedroom footage and sundry financial entanglements. The theft of the election was greatly assisted by the gross corruption that pervades American democracy.

But in 2020, the presidential election was robust, the Russian (or was it Ukrainian?) enthusiasm for interference having vanished, the pervasive corruption in check. If any personal sleaze or unfortunate entanglement attended Joe Biden's family, it was no part of the press's role to vulgarly blow it out of proportion.

IN BRITAIN, THE ONLY QUESTION IS: where do you start? Tony Blair and Iraq? Blair and his demographic reshaping of Britain? Jeremy Corbyn and his theories about groups of people who had theories about him? Obviously not: those conspiracies are offered up by bumpkins. Instead, you start with and the broadsheet columnists. You start with Brexi ception brought to you by a non-exhaustive list of Ar aster capitalist billionaires; Steve Bannon and other have only a vague sense of; the Canadians; the Saud stanis (look it up: it's on the internet); and, most pro that energetic global web-spinner, President Putin.

We'll dispense with how any of these malign force secured the Brexit referendum. We'll just focus on wl Russians: they obviously wanted the UK to leave the — well, here the theory becomes obscure. Mayb wanted chaos, although they could, up to a poi something that smelt vaguely merely by having useful, high- manically overstating their supp calculable influence.

THAT THE BREXIT REFEREN was achieved through dastardly is an article of faith for a section conventionally learned. Nothing evidence, inquiry, parliamentary regulatory finding can shake then belief. What gives current conspi ries among the cognitive elite th drive is, however, exactly what di when they're spouted by the lump at the bottom: unfairness.

It's not fair that Remain los Trump won, once. These things a scionable and their explanati therefore be diabolic.

It's tempting to take steps in this analytic directio nestly muse on "modern mediated society" and pos ism, on the faux-worldly "ignorant knowing" that n how people show their awareness of what's happenin them. They know you see, they've cottoned on.

From the Deep State being a Turkish term for Henr Establishment, but with a bigger black helicopter buc see what they did there", the attitude is the same: an ir brow raised to the transparent machinations of our r also how the fury wells up, because having seen thr charade, these open-eyed people are rightly outrage rulers' wickedness, in Brexiting or Trumping.

The antidote to all of this is relaxed cynicism. There i new about even the most educated subscribing to far order to describe a reality they dislike. The mistake wo suppose that modernity — be it in terms of manners or ogy — has fundamentally changed meaning. It has no are as they are, and that includes a great deal of silliness

The Critic

It's not fair that Remain lost or that Trump won, once. These things are unconscionable and therefore diabolical

ontents

JMNS

s 8

ıan Meades
ıp by the pigs 6

mics
ngdon: The huge increase in pending has to be tackled 9

'ypes
lor on Cheryl Partington 13

een's Dictionary
ic Green on "Queer" 17

Starkey
oes of the past are now the of ridicule by the ignorant 24

Rozenberg: Changing ı law is a tricky business 33

ling Board
s Walker: The pandemic has l some unwelcome tropes 43

day Lies
ore Dalrymple: Diego ona was not a victim 47

oke world
a McGrath: It was the year that ectional identity triumphed 55

eo Coates
ıde to historical fact 86

m Elia on...
headed Peter's pandemic 7

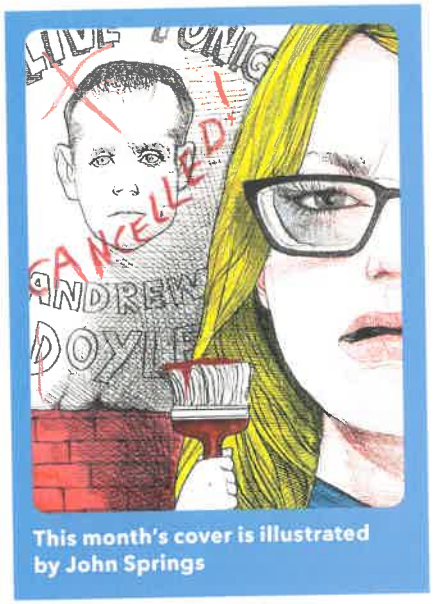
Dant on...
nian Europe 56

ATURES

ed out by the comedy club
ew Doyle discovers that Titania aughing matter for some 10

ıd up the ordinary suspects
Cohen criticises the anti-elitist ocial justice elite 14

BBC, a class apart
ael Collins says the corporation ıting the wrong war, as usual 18



This month's cover is illustrated by John Springs

Beware of bad ideas
Bruce Gilley traces the worst new thinking to university campuses 21

WISEMAN'S AMERICA
Oliver Wiseman argues there is too little money in US politics 26

Triumph of the Trump Doctrine
Bartle Bull admires the most successful US foreign policy since Reagan 28

Dolled up
Josephine Bartosch warns of the danger to society of sex robots 34

Flogged off
Alexander Larman investigates the growing trend for institutions to sell their valuable book collections 36

A question of taste
Clive Aslet believes Tate Britain is making a meal of its restaurant mural 38

Down with the Old Masters
Charles Saumarez Smith fears museums will soon look very different 40

The straits of Hell
Rosie Whitehouse talks to an indomitable Holocaust survivor 45

Dream fishing
Patrick Bishop is hooked on angling 48

Meet me at Ronnie's
Dominic Green remembers the legendary Soho jazz club 50

Everything I haven't done
Joseph Connolly lists his considerable non-achievements 52

Squaring the circle
Daniel Johnson reflects on the lasting influence of the Vienna philosophers 58

BOOKS

Andrew Roberts: *Statesman of Europe: A Life of Sir Edward Grey* by T.G. Otte 62

John Maier: *The Polymath: A Cultural History from Leonardo da Vinci to Susan Sontag* by Peter Burke 64

John Bowers: *In Black and White* by Alexandra Wilson 66

Helen Dale: *Wisdom of the Ancients: Life Lessons from our Distant Past* by Neil Oliver 68

Tibor Fischer: *Out of the Ether* by Matthew Leising 70

Jonathon Green: *From Aconite to the Zodiac Killer: A Dictionary of Crime* by Amanda Lees 71

Roland White: *The Secret Life of Special Advisers* by Peter Cardwell 73

Patrick Galbraith: *The Gull Next Door* by Marianne Taylor 74

Guy Walters: *Portrait of a Muse* by Andrew Gaily 75

Jessica Douglas-Home: *Anthony Whishaw: Works on Paper* by Richard Davey 77

Christopher Bray: *Devils, Lusts and Strange Desires: The Life of Patricia Highsmith* by Richard Bradford 78

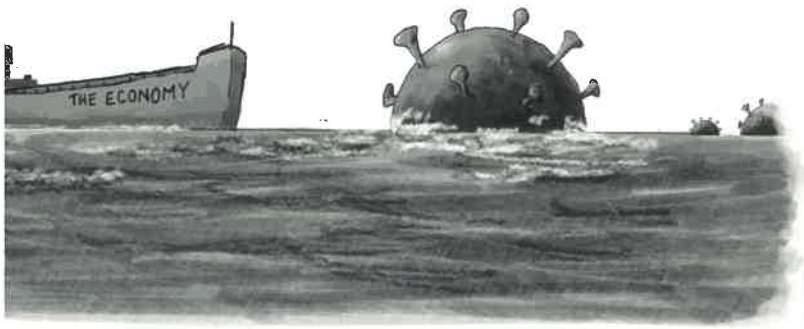
Louise Perry: *Kink* edited by R.O. Kwon and Garth Greenwell 80

David Womersley: *Darke Matter* by Rick Gekoski 81

John Self: My pick of 2020 fiction 83

THE SECRET AUTHOR
A six-point manifesto to improve the lot of literary strugglers 85

nuary/February 2021 | Issue 14



CRITICS

Norman Lebrecht
lemic is a disaster but it could
n opportunity for change 88

Robert Thicknesse
nposers hit the right note in the
r an earthly paradise 89

rah Ditum
stars can be manly and wear
o — ask Harry Styles 90

ichael Prodger
es are still forking out while
scratch around for money 91

RE Anne McElvoy
ted young actor/writers offer a
taster for 2021 92

A Christopher Silvester
s the key word in the
n to the Oscars 93

ISION Adam LeBor
gramme on the Holocaust has
cted link to my family story 94

E TALK

ut
n savours a sensationally-
ndon institution 97

n
nández-Armesto chooses
over aphrodisiacs 99

Wine
Christopher Pincher slams the door on a bad year with a classic champagne 100

Sol y Sombra
Christopher North ponders bullfighting and the Catholic view of death 101

Country Notes
Patrick Galbraith reflects on shootin', fishin' and male friendship 102

Root and Branch
Hephzibah Anderson says compost is the heart of every garden 103

Running Repairs
Nick Cohen blames testosterone for his latest sports injury 104

Style
Hannah Betts finds chic alternatives to dreary sweatpants 105

Dealing
Thomas Woodham-Smith doesn't collect, he accumulates stock 106

Tickets, Please
Tom Chesshyre reports on the dusty allure of distant train museums 107

Hot House
Claudia Savage-Gore on the nuances of nurturing a G&T 109

SACRED COWS
Frida Kahlo
by Michael Prodger 110

The Critic

thecritic.co.uk
Carlyle House, 235-237 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 1EJ
editorial@thecritic.co.uk

The Critic is published by Locomotive 6960 Ltd

© LOCOMOTIVE 6960 LIMITED 2021

Editorial
Publisher & Co-Editor: Michael Mosbacher
Co-Editor: Christopher Montgomery
Executive Editor: Robert Low
Art Director: Martin Colyer
Political Editor: Graham Stewart
Deputy Political Editor: David Scullion
US Editor: Oliver Wiseman
Production: Alexander Glover, Nick Pryer, Olivia Hartley
Editorial Assistant: Anna Price
Contributing Editors: Daniel Johnson, Dominic Green, Roger Kimball, Toby Young
Artists in Residence: Adam Dant, Miriam Elia

Subscriptions
Annual Subscription rates:
UK: £46, Europe: £52,
Rest of the World: £55
Subscription and delivery queries:
The Critic Subscriptions,
Intermedia Brand Marketing Ltd,
Unit 6, The Enterprise Centre, Kelvin Lane,
Crawley, West Sussex, RH10 9PE
Telephone: 01293 312250
Email: thecritic@subscriptionhelpline.co.uk
Web: thecritic.imbmsubscriptions.com

Publishing
Advertising: Michael Mosbacher
michael.mosbacher@thecritic.co.uk
Printing: Acorn Web Offset Limited, Normanton Industrial Estate, Loscoe Close, Normanton WF6 1TW
Distribution: Intermedia Brand Marketing Ltd, Unit 6, The Enterprise Centre, Kelvin Lane, Crawley, West Sussex, RH10 9PE

The Critic is registered as a trade mark (No UK00003433651), owned by Locomotive 6960 Ltd.

JONATHAN MEADES

Power to the pigs and les keufs

AUTHORITARIANISM breeds authoritarianism. A figure whose flimsy authority derives from the position he holds rather than from his barely human quiddity will, out of fear and self-preservation, appoint and promote in his own likeness whilst feigning to do otherwise and appease the gods of Diversity.

Thus a cabal may include a Token Woman, a Token communicant of the Bovril Eucharist, a Token Hindu Woman (two for the price of one), a Token Muslim, a Token butch former screw from Holloway, a Token Dolt who doesn't know the geography of the island he lives on, a Token Token who doesn't realise he/she/it is a Token and believes he/she/it is there On Merit (i.e. went to Harrow not Eton).

What these people share apart from being beholden to their master's whim, is a conviction that because they are in his image they are beyond the rule of law which, like taxes, is for little people, the millions of potential offenders whom the pigs and the cabal intend to further suppress with a revised Public Order Act. Law made by the pigs is bad law. It gives even more power to the pigs who are in clover without responsibility for anything save their batons and tear gas.

It was 39 years ago that I was beaten up by four plain-clothes pigs in an unmarked van who had pulled over a car I was travelling in. The friend whose car it was was not driving erratically. She had had nothing to drink. Nor had I. The pigs, however, had.

When I remarked that they might act with greater courtesy towards her, Pigs A and B grabbed me and hit my head repeatedly on the car's boot. They then dragged me into the van and took me to Shepherd's Bush nick where Pig C, the uniformed desk sergeant, wrestled me to the ground and tried to beat the shit out of me, banging my head on the concrete floor.

I was, risibly, charged with "obstructing the pigs in the prosecution of their duty". I talked to a brief I knew. He said that because I had no visible wounds there was bugger-all I could do. He was, however, not surprised: this was a weekly occurrence at Shepherd's Bush.

The stipe (legalese for failed barrister) at Marylebone Magistrates Court couldn't even be bothered to listen to what I said. The pigs were, in his opinion, inviolable. Common law does not apply to them.

France is competing with the UK to be every bit as draconian and liberty-infringing

These creatures are likely to be granted further powers under a proposed revision of the Public Order Act. That is what Top Sow Cressida Dick wants. It is a further affront to democracy and to the right to protest.

Not that the Token Hindu Female Office Warrior posing as home secretary will see it that way. The increasingly illiberal elite's reactions to just about anything public it disagrees with are *Not Allowed* or *Let's Ban It* or *Send In The Pigs To Give Them The Taste Of Some Good Old-Fashioned British Coppering*.

The questionably named United Kingdom is not alone in possessing a cadre of aspirant Stasis, totenkopf nostalgics and wannabe tonton macoutes. France is competing to be every bit as draconian and liberty-infringing. Again the police are behind it. In the eyes of the minister of the interior Gérald Darmanin les keufs can do little wrong. Jean-Michel Fauvergue was the head of the elite (or ultra violent) force called RAID. He is now a deputy whose hobby is kung fu. He is "the author" of the *Securité Globale* project which grants exceptional powers not merely to les keufs but, extraordinarily, to private security agents. Anyone who has seen RAID in action would conclude that they already possess exceptional powers — which are of course required in exceptional circumstances such as the Daesh attack at the Bataclan hall in 2015.

The proposed law's Article 24 has attracted the greatest attention and the greatest p outrage because it targets journalist photographers and the whole world owns a camera: as well as being boo authoritarian it is laughably tardy.

Its crude purpose prevent images of les being diffused and re nised: so no faces or identifying features m shown in any media. measure is obviously intended to suppress record of state violen effectively grants imm from prosecution to l and, along the way, to fantasist imposters lil Macron's chum Alex Benalla who enjoys nothing better t putting on a helmet and protective clothing and attacking harmless tou

Much less attention has been pa two other articles, no doubt becaus do not impinge on journalistic prac Article 23 withdraws the right to ea release from prison for anyone wh assaulted les keufs, firemen or elect representatives, making explicit tha life of these persons is worth more t that of Monsieur and Madame Duc What this has to do with equality is anyone's guess.

Article 25 is another blunder. It g keufs the right to carry arms off dut the fondness these people have for showing off their faulty prowess wi shooters, it is asking for trouble.

Macron, drawn in to the affair a his will, is having to sort out the co caused by the headstrong Darmani would prefer to play the statesman, announcing a day of mourning for the one-term narcissistic poltroon was too gutless to eliminate the Ay Khomeini when that disgusting old was an indulged guest of the Frenc state, plotting and receiving terrori Neauphle-le-Chateau. The conseq of that inaction contaminate the pl indefinitely and supply a useful m Darmanin and the Token Hindu F Office Warrior.

iriam Elia on...

Letters

Write to The Critic by email at **letters@thecritic.co.uk** including your address and telephone number

"These rem
doctors'
appointm
are getting
ridiculous.

REPORTING THE BOSNIAN WAR

Several claims in Janine di Giovanni's article *Lessons of Bosnian war and peace* (December) reflect poorly on me professionally and need correcting.

I was the *Sunday Times* reporter working in Bosnia before her arrival there, and my peers will have little difficulty identifying me as the "unhappy" middle-aged male reporter she claims to have "displaced". As I went on to spend a further nine months in country for the paper between late 1992 and January 1994, I am mystified by her use of that term.

More seriously, her claim that I gave her maps of the wrong roads is false. I have no recollection of giving her any maps — she wasn't driving. Front lines in central Bosnia were shifting because of Croat attacks on Muslim communities, which may be the cause of her confusion. To provide deliberately misleading information to a colleague in a war zone would be criminally irresponsible.

Nor did I "threaten to sabotage" her trips into Sarajevo. By late 1992 it was clear that Christmas there was going to be a big story. I pitched to go but was told the decision had been made to send her. That was the end of the matter. I should add I barely knew the photographer who took her into the city despite her claim that I was his "mate".

The only occasion I did become irate, and fire off an intemperate fax to the editor was when I was tasked with providing 1,500 words on the war in winter 1992. To file involved a 100-mile dash to Split across icy mountain tracks not knowing whether a gun-toting maniac might be lurking around the next corner. I was flabbergasted to learn that the following Sunday's paper contained a piece of similar length by Janine di Giovanni, with not a word of my copy to be seen. She was not the target of my criticism.

What particularly rankles about her apparent desire to be seen as the "lady of the lamp" in the charnel house of Bosnia is that it occludes the work of other journalists who struggled hard to make the world take notice.

Probably half a dozen other *Sunday Times* correspondents covered the conflict at one time or another, including three other women. There was no acrimony between any of us.

The Bosnian war has sometimes been described as a "watershed" for women journalists as so many there performed with notable bravery and professionalism. The list includes Marshall of ITN, who was among who exposed the Serb murder ca Maggie O'Kane of the *Guardian*, travelled alone by bus through m the Serb-held territory witnessin cleansing at first-hand; and Cori Dufka, a Reuters photographer b injured by a mine in Gornji Vaku

She obtained the first pictures paramilitaries ethnically cleansi Mostar and spent days, together late French photographer Alexar Boulat, with the Muslim inhabita that city when they were under i bombardment. They were the o Western journalists to do so.

Janine di Giovanni's claim tha women in those days were worki reporting conflict doesn't bear c scrutiny, any more than her sug that male reporters generally re their female counterparts as "de features". I can't speak for any of women I have named, of course, from a male perspective the sug is demeaning.

It's a sexist trope, a bit like des me as a "middle-aged male corr ent." That bit really hurt. I hadn't turned 40!

Andrew Hogg
SELSEY, WEST SUSSEX

nproductive investment

Sunak boasts of a huge public spending. That nean big tax increases

ATIONS HAVE ONLY limited resources. The allocation of these resources to the most productive ends is crucial to maximising ıd achieving the highest possible ıdards. Lord Lawson was right to deride Boris Johnson for ic illiteracy" when the prime ısed the argument of job creation ıis "green industrial revolution". n said, a programme to erect ıes in every town and village ate jobs, but "that doesn't make it thing to do".

ıte must never be deemed le for providing jobs to everyone. e state should allow market forces eely so that people are employed y can produce most, subject of their preferences for work and ıd for the varying attributes of obs. Further, it should hardly e said that individuals know what erences are in these matters, overnment bureaucrats do not. pily, the British economy seems st the knack of achieving ty growth. From 2004 to 2019 head increased by only 0.6 per ; the lowest number over such a d since the start of the Industrial ı. National output increased ıgly, by 1.5 per cent a year, nployment increased by ıt a year. But labour velopments imply that m-term prospects are much worse.

; YEARS TO 2019 nt rose from 28.5 million lion, or by 4.3 million ıt the rise was by the effects of ın, notably from ropean countries that joined the European Union at the start of the period. Non-UK-born employment climbed in the 15 years to 2019 by no less than 3.1 million, while employment of the UK-born advanced only 1.2 million. Looking ahead, Brexit will discourage immigration from the EU. Indeed, immigration may become emigration, as living standards and wages in Eastern Europe catch up with those in Britain, and some workers of East European origins return home. Meanwhile, the number of UK-born people of working age will more or less flat over the next few decades.

Unless something remarkable is about to happen, advances in national output will be limited in the medium-term future to the gain in productivity. To repeat, that has been little more than ½ per cent a year for quite a long time.

SUPPOSE THAT THE GOVERNMENT boosts its spending by, say, 2 per cent a year in this context. Then over time the share of government spending in national output will increase remorselessly. Over a decade the ratio of government spending to output would in fact rise by 16 per cent.

The UK had a large budget deficit even before Covid-19 hit our economy and society. If the government is now intent on raising its expenditure by 2 per cent a year, it may eventually have to make some very unpopular announcements. To prevent the deficit running out of control and to stop the public debt exploding, taxes would need to rise — in that decade of 2-per-cent-a-year rises in public expenditure — by about a sixth.

None of the above is particularly complex. The facts on productivity and immigration are well-known. There can be little doubt that working class voters for the Conservatives in the 2019 general election were partly motivated by disillusionment with a Labour Party which wanted the UK to remain in the EU with its open borders and a single, increasingly unified labour market. Whatever Boris Johnson's cosmopolitan outlook, openness to more immigration would be politically suicidal.

CAUTION AND RESTRAINT over public expenditure in current circumstances ought to be the watchwords of the political elite, regardless of party allegiance. Unfortunately, our chancellor of the exchequer, Rishi Sunak, thinks on different lines. To quote a key passage from last month's *Spending Review 2020*, "The government has kept capital spending over the forecast period as set out in Budget 2020, consistent with delivering the highest sustained levels of public sector net investment as a proportion of [gross domestic product] since the late 1970s. For core day-to-day spending after 2021-22, the government has maintained the assumption of 2.1 per cent real terms increases per year made at Budget 2020."

Will taxes be higher in 2024, when — if it lasts that long — the present government faces the next general election? Unless the public finances are to be allowed to deteriorate drastically in the meantime, the answer has to be "yes". And can it be overlooked that an increase in the tax burden discourages work and thrift, and so aggravates the stagnation of productivity?

Johnson claims to benefit from "an indecent amount of brilliant ideas". But a surfeit of what seem like brilliant ideas to politicians — such as the green industrial strategy, HS2, state aid for shipbuilding and government subsidies for high-tech — is exactly what worries Lord Lawson and the author of this column. All of the green industrial strategy, HS2, et al, will reduce productivity relative to the free-market alternative, in which managements have to ensure that labour and capital are deployed efficiently and profitably.

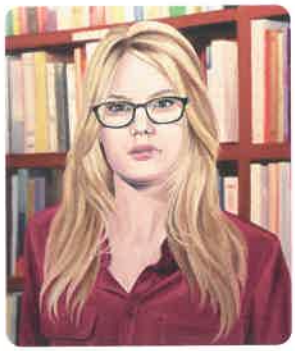
Andrew Doyle wonders why so many comedians are offended by the satire of Titania McGrath

Kicked out of the comedy clul

EVERY GAY PERSON WHO GREW UP before the new millennium knew that coming out of the closet wasn't a one-off affair. It was an exercise to be repeated in the various spheres of one's existence — family, friends, work — and there would always be new social situations in which it was prudent to find a way to communicate the information to avoid any embarrassing assumptions.

Few of us had the reach of Tom Daley, who could put out a statement on YouTube and get the job over and done with at one fell swoop. I remember being genuinely shocked when I saw that video, mostly because I couldn't believe there was anyone out there who had actually thought Tom Daley was straight.

My most recent "outing" was as the writer of Titania McGrath, an intersectional activist who began life on Twitter in order that she might chastise the unwoke for their moral impurity and proclaim her infinite virtue to the cybersphere. For those of you who are not on Twitter — that's the 80 per cent of the country who actually value their time on earth — you may not be aware that such self-aggrandising behaviour is considered acceptable. On Twitter, it's the norm. It's effectively a digital playground in which grown adults toss their half-baked opinions around like pies in that scene from *Bugsy Malone*.



The troublesome Titania McGrath

From Titania's earliest appearance, I resolved to stay anonymous — not to cause mischief, but more for the fun of it. If people believed she was real, I reasoned, I could enter into dialogue with her detractors. This meant that the satirical impact would not be restricted to what Titania said, but how others reacted to her. Her tweets are designed to ridicule the excesses of the social justice left, but her interactions tend to expose the folly of those on the right who take her at face value and lose their temper. As such, her targets are not limited to one side of the political spectrum.

Once the account was known to be the work of a comedian, these kind of exchanges became less frequent. For good reason, people are wary of engaging with fictional characters on a public forum. So when in March 2019 I received an email from Rosamund Urwin at the *Sunday Times* asking me outright if I was behind Titania McGrath, I was a little uncertain how to respond. She had been watching interviews I'd given and had read some of my articles, and had noted similarities with some of Titania's ite references.

Titania McGrath's latest book is *My First Little Book of Intersectional Activism* (Constable)

This was impressive investigative journalism, but I stil prepared to give up my anonymity quite yet. As a (plagued with the prospect of perdition, I cannot bring m tell a lie. So I fudged it. I told Urwin that I was flattere neither denied nor confirmed her suspicions. Still she pe "Are you 100 per cent saying it is not you?" she asked. sorry!" I replied. This was the truth, of course. I was no that I wasn't Titania. By this ingenious lexical prestidig was able to fend off any further queries and at the sam condemning myself to the everlasting flames of Hell.

AFTER THE *SUNDAY TIMES* ARTICLE was publish "smoking gun" was discovered by a comedy websit Chortle, which had somehow got hold of a document f Frankfurt bookfair in which the publishe nia's first book, *Woke: A Guide to Social* had accidentally revealed my identity which meant that just at the very mom book was due to be published, there wa den deluge of publicity about my autho was invited to be interviewed on televisio and by national newspapers.

One would be forgiven for supposin had manufactured the whole thing, and "outing" was an avaricious ploy to enhan sales. In truth, I lack the necessary guile coct such a scheme. Only the likes of Pet delson or Hannibal Lecter could be so sh

Nevertheless, Titania's fame quickly grew, and by I year she had more than half a million followers and a book deal. As her popularity increased, the venom of th disapproved of the character became more toxic. For sc son these tended to be the very kind of identity-c faux-leftists that Titania was satirising, but I'm sure tha coincidence.

Having been revealed as the author, most of this ver now channelled in my direction. The extent of the abus ten unfathomable, and some even went so far as to ser threats of violence. It's a curiosity of our times that the cious and bullying online behaviour tends to be exhi those who claim to be on the side of empathy and comp

I have never quite understood the kind of anger that and satire can provoke. As someone who has seen my f

lative powers can supplement authoritarianism with new hate speech laws that go beyond traditional restraints. A model can be found in the Scottish government's attempt to redefine hate crime on the grounds of disability, race, religion, sexual orientation and transgender identity — but not sex, for no one wants to defend tearful white women.

Scottish nationalists want to add the vague and subjective crime of "insulting behaviour" to existing laws against threatening behaviour. They ignored lawyers' warnings that all sorts of people are capable of being insulted by all sorts of things whereas words are either threatening or they are not. I would expect a future Labour government in Westminster and centre-left governments in Europe to come up with imitations of such dangerously sweeping laws.

A few years ago, you would hear people say that political correctness was just modern politeness. Now the arts, liberal press, publishing and academia are being torn apart by demands to blacklist and ban. Movements that once had emancipatory potential have degenerated. They wanted to recognise queer identities or to stop governments from trying to persuade people with disabilities to adapt themselves to society and work a little harder on persuading society to adapt itself t they have been taken over by heresy hunters scouri dia to find and punish unbelievers.

Pluckrose and Lindsay quote academic after a nouncing anything other than deference to their vie fragility" or "wilful ignorance". "Resistance will not b derail the class discussions," said one. "Critical p gards the claims that students make in response to s issues not as propositions to be assessed for their but as expressions of power that function to re-inscr petuate social inequalities," said a second.

You might not care what academics and studen ideas seep out of the lecture hall and students jo There is nothing new in today's radicals becoming establishment. Their willingness to reject the core Enlightenment liberalism and the scientific metho ing without constraint is the best way to advance however, remains novel and well worth fighting.

Nick Cohen is a journalist, author and political commentator and a columnist for the *Observer*

DR GREEN'S DICTIONARY

"Queer"

In 1973, Anthony Burgess wrote in the *New Yorker* that he first had heard the phrase *queer as a clockwork orange* in a London pub before the Second World War: "It is an old Cockney slang phrase, implying a queerness or madness so extreme as to subvert nature." Elsewhere, Burgess claimed to have heard it in an Army barracks. He either misheard it or heard a malapropism. The likely source was *queer as a Chocolate Orange*; the Terry's Chocolate Works had launched its strange fruit in 1932.

The sense of *queer* as unnatural is first attested in print in 1508. The original meaning (strange, odd, unusual in appearance or character, possibly sick) still pertains, albeit ironically, as in Stanley Holloway's 1959 monologue, "My word, you do look queer".

In eighteenth-century slang, *to feel queer* was to be drunk. Demotic Londoners described odd behaviour as *queer as Dick's hatband* (1835). Those who went off the straight and narrow through debt, delinquency or sickness resided on *Queer Street* (1837). To avoid it, the Cockney salesman was wary of the rival who *queered his pitch* (1846). *Queer as a nine-bob note* still circulates, after inflation, as *queer as a three-pound note*. So does *queer as a coot*, which the slang authority Jonathon Green attributes to Julian Maclaren-Ross, a frequenter of London pubs before, during and after the Second World War.

The OED attributes the first written use of *queer* as a pejorative for a homosexual man to 1894. The pioneer was perhaps the most famous *queer-baiter* in British history, the Marquess of Queensberry. The author of the rules of boxing is not known to have graduated to *queer-bashing*, though he did accuse Oscar Wilde of "posing as a somdomite [sic]". Yet Eric Partridge's *Dictionary of Slang* dates this usage to around 1914, and mostly in the United States. This is intriguing, as the contemporaneous rise of "gay" as an insult has been traced to Australia, another society of manly settlers. Did "gay", like *queer*, begin in the Mother Country and bloom in coarser climes?

By the late Eighties the gay rights' movement had publicly revalued *queer* as an affirmation; the direct-action group *Queer Nation* was founded in New York in 1990. Today all non-heterosexuals can identify as *genderqueer*. A *straight ally* ma self-identify as *culturally queer* a object to *queerbaiting*, the mar of films and television series to and *straight-ally* audiences by h *queer* content without actually delivering. The academic field o *Studies* specialises in *queering* i objects of study, as in *Queering Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology* (1994).

Indian cricketers may yet ado *queer*. In 2015, Sankaran Krishn published an academic study of vs Australia matches, "Queering pitch: Race, class and gender in Indo-Australian encounter". The recurs in Ronojoy Sen's 2018 arti the *Times of India* on "fate in cric and Anglo bias in defining a 'spo wicket". The Marquess of Queen would have had a rule for that.

Dominic Green is deputy editor the *Spectator*'s US edition

SHARONA JACOBS

el Collins says the corporation is fighting the wrong war, as usual

he BBC, a class apart

OCTOBER ALAN YENTOB AND CAMILA Bat-anghelidjh appeared in court at the beginning of a ne-week hearing following the collapse of her charity .ds Company, of which he was chairman. Six years ırlier the pair were seated together in a setting suited the excesses that led the charity to insolvency. It was dinner at a Mayfair hotel where select guests paid trib-gure as synonymous with the BBC as Eric Gill's *Ariel* the Test Card girl: Yentob.

ent was organised by the Media d overseen by its president, Pe-ne speaker joked of the millions ıwson had made since Yentob n screen. Another claimed the l harangued Yentob because he to produce radical films (he'd ıterviewed Bette Midler). Some vryly to Judaism; many name-Oxbridge. Yentob, they said, the BBC insider, was once an outsid-he one intern that wasn't an Ox-ıduate when beginning his BBC 1968. This, they proclaimed, said out the man: the Great Panjan-t what did it say about the BBC? Greg Dyke described the BBC as y white" during his brief stint as general in the early 2000s, it start-nd for similar generalisations corporation that were just as disingenuous. If the staff ned by race they were also defined by class. The per-f ethnic minorities working within the BBC surely sur-at of the share of the national demographic, yet this is ıse when it comes to social class. What defined a major-atives at the BBC, whatever their hue, was a degree by one of two universities.

Inform, educate and entertain: John Reith caricatured in *Punch* in 1934

OF US IN THE MINORITY that managed to bunk in his qualification discovered that, decades after the rad-es tenure of Hugh Carleton Greene, little had changed. a respectable TV résumé I failed the BBC boards. ippy and common I attributed this to the absence of a when interviewed by someone who appeared to be a descendant of the Sackville-Wests. I appealed directly, and desperately, to the presenter and producer on *Peter York's Eighties* at BBC Arts in the mid-1990s, landing a short-term contract in a dream job. At lunchtime I circled the "doughnut" at BBC TV Centre, staring skyward to T. B. Huxley-Jones's sculpture of Helios, not quite believing my luck. I was in the beautiful, minimalist belly of the broadcasting beast despite being, like Alan Yentob, an outsider. (He'd attended the Sorbonne. His parents had a home on Park Lane. The family owned Dents, the luxury glove company. *But he never went to Oxbridge.*)

This obsession with class, Oxbridge and pedigree is as Reithian as the founding father's famous credo: "inform, educate and entertain". John Reith attended Glasgow University, which he considered one of his failures. Initially, he ignored John Logie Baird for attending a university in the same city and fiddling around with televisions. (He had numerous idiosyncrasies, like barring homosexuals and divorcées from playing in the BBC orchestras.) During his reign as first director-general a mission statement in Latin was inscribed on a corridor wall in Broadcasting House: a dedication to the God the governors affiliated themselves with by spreading the word. And the word was: *that good seed sown may bring forth good harvest, and that all things foul or hostile to peace may be banished thence, and that the people inclining their ear to whatsoever things are lovely and honest, whatsoever things are of good report, may tread the path of virtue and wisdom.*

If Reith's faith in broadcasting was shaken with the birth of television, it disappeared entirely with the prospect of commercial channels. When ITV was launched he compared it to the plague, warning of its impact on moral values and ethical and intellectual standards. "He who prides himself on giving what he thinks the public wants," he said, "is often creating a fictitious demand for low standards which he will then satisfy."

THIS PERHAPS SUMS UP THE LEGACY of recent director-general Lord Hall, when pushing a fictitious demand for a laboured "diversity" agenda. The equality of opportunity many of us would have liked to have seen emerge at institutions such as the BBC is being replaced by an equality of outcome. Will social pedigree be entirely overtaken by that of a tokenistic ethnicity when it comes to recruitment? (Yesterday's Dimbleby is today's Chakrabarti.) In both instances merit isn't always paramount.

Odd this should be a focus as the broadcaster is in the throes

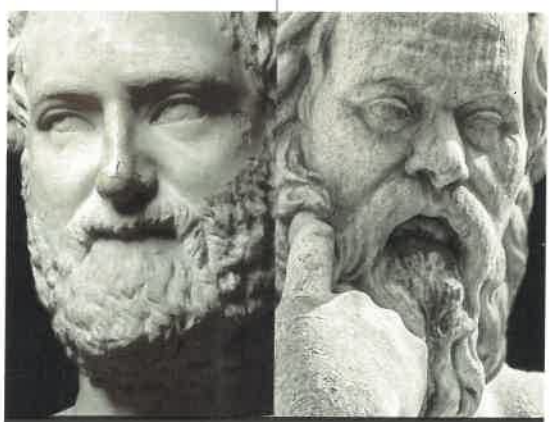
CHRONICLE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ı radical academic orthodoxy is out of kilter with mainstream public opinion, emocratic state has a duty to act as an ideological gatekeeper to protect society

'eware of Bad Ideas

ruce Gilley

N THE LONG HISTORICAL RIVALRY between town and gown, the Trump administration's Executive Order 13950 of 22 September 2020 was something of a watershed. The order on "Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping" was an unusually specific and high-level example of democratic society exercising what I will call a "reverse gatekeeping" function against what are ɔad ideas borne inside the academy. The executive order at the core assumptions of identity essentialism, the di- f citizens into oppressor and oppressed, and the as- ns of guilt and virtue based on group characteristics fashionable in the academy, but they have no place in ıs and activities supported by Federal taxpayer dollars". ; ideas, it warned, were "migrating from the fringes of n society and threaten [...] to infect core institutions of ıtry". The day after the order, Russ Vought, director of the management and budget, said in an interview that the ɔing "emanates from left-wing universities across the that suggests that our institutions are fundamentally d need to be brought down". ; the order sparked healthy on so-called "diversity" the more interesting aspect stark example of an inver- he usual hierarchy of judg- is normally academics, sit- ıeir ivory towers, who keep s and evidence from cam- they find to be defective. ; had a reversal of polarity: ·d government rejecting an ı such wide currency that ademics denied that it was ıt all, but instead simply an : rendering of reality. is a clear parallel here with the concept of "academic ing" — decisions by those in educational institutions ɔit discussions, publications, speakers, or faculty hires ·ey viewpoints they feel "threaten to infect core institutions" of the university. The phenomena of cancel culture, no-platforming, and ideologically-driven hiring and promotion decisions are part of this problem of academic gatekeeping.



Gatekeeping battle: Aristophanes and Socrates

The justifications offered are typically very similar to those offered by the executive order, namely that they hold sway only on the "fringes of American society" and therefore have no place within its central institutions. For instance, the near-disappearance of the teaching of conservative political theories and philosophies on American college campuses has been justified on the grounds it represents, in the words of one Oxford reference volume, "the last gasp of an endangered species" or a "self-destructive faith in a system out to demean [women]".

By contrast, "reverse gatekeeping" refers to efforts by mainstream society to protect itself from the bad ideas hatched inside the academy. What is new is that it, like its analogue in the academy, makes use of institutional and policy power, not just arguments. For 30 years from Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987) to Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt's *The Coddling of the American Mind* (2018), conservatives and classical liberals have been making good faith arguments about bad ideas. Many have concluded that this battle can no longer be fought with salvos of ideas because the contemporary academy has declared that the battle of ideas is itself part of the problem.

Lyell Asher, for instance, noted that in education colleges, aspiring teachers are regularly taken to training seminars where they are taught, to quote one training slide, that "the term 'diversity of opinion' is white supremacist bullshit!". Both forms of gatekeeping therefore mean the deployment of power, rather than arguments.

GOING BACK TO THE CLASSICAL world, there has been a constant struggle by townies to protect themselves from what are perceived as bad ideas among the gownies. The Greek comedic writer Aristophanes rallied the middle classes of Athens against the sophist theories of Socrates in his play *The Clouds* of 423 BC. Socrates later credited this act of reverse gatekeeping with encouraging he and his students to develop a more pragmatic "political" philosophy that became the basis of Western civilisation.

One might say that reverse gatekeeping is a central institution of a liberal society. Likewise, the Church in the middle ages had to limit the anti-material theories of poverty promoted by various scholastic orders, an injunction that allowed for the emergence of a "spirit of capitalism" within Christian thought and Western civilisation. The cases seem endless once one takes "the

intellectual" as the intellectual problem that has repeatedly been solved by society.

THERE ARE TWO FEATURES that distinguish reverse gatekeeping from academic gatekeeping, aside from the obvious differences in the direction of the flow of ideas and who is doing the gatekeeping.

One, is that academic gatekeeping suffers from problems of legitimacy given the unrepresentative and undemocratic constitution of the modern university. That is part of the larger problem of the virtual disappearance of conservative and classical liberal ideas in the humanities and social sciences, as well as in many professional schools that train the next generation of leaders in areas such as social work, criminology and criminal justice, law, education, public health, public policy and administration, and urban planning. By contrast, reverse gatekeeping, when it is enacted by duly elected governments or authorities that have traction in the preferences of a significant proportion of the citizenry, is a legitimate part of the responsibility of a democratic government.

Second, and related, whereas academic gatekeeping is justified on substantive normative or ethical grounds, reverse gatekeeping can also be justified on procedural grounds. It can point to the lack of appropriate scientific conditions in the academy, the most important of which is a competing range of ideas that broadly reflect the competing range of ideas in society, as reason enough to doubt the validity of ideas found there. By contrast, as a second-best approximation, it can cite the existence in a free society of a more appropriate set of scientific conditions in the educated and reasoned debates of society at large, which find their traction in the duly elected representatives of the people.

As a procedural matter, very little that holds wide currency in the academy should be trusted as valid or defensible no matter how institutionalised. And, by contrast, ideas that hold sway over a significant portion of the population of a free country and that have endured over sustained time periods have ipso facto empirical and normative defensibility because they have stood this procedural test of validation.

Today, the extensive "negative" freedoms in a liberal society, as well as its capitalist economic organisation, have proven to be "good ideas" by this standard of procedural validation, an argument made by both Michael Mandelbaum in his *The Ideas That Conquered The World* (2002) and more recently by Deirdre McCloskey's *Why Liberalism Works* (2019). By contrast, the "critical" theories that dominate thinking in the contemporary academy on all things political, social, and economic, and which insist on various forms of illiberal coercion of society, are ideas that have failed to take root in society.

While the substantive import of reverse gatekeeping today will in most cases protect conservative or classical liberal positions, it is not by necessity a conservative or classical liberal aim. There was a time, for instance, when the classicists who controlled the universities insisted that a fluency in Latin and a familiarity with Homer were what was needed to, for instance, govern the colonies or run the Internal Revenue Service, tion lamented by the president of Harvard in 1907. The more applied training required reverse gatekeeping tc these "conservative" ideas which no longer reflected the (ered values and preferences of wider society. The limite chise was likewise defended strenuously by scholars as a idea" until popular preferences pushed for a change.

Today, there are critics in society who believe that the my is still dominated by conservative and classical liber that need to be "reverse gatekeeped" by progressives. stance, some critics want to gatekeep mainstream ac economics ideas like balancing budgets, stimulating gro tax cuts, and allowing pay to reflect worker productivit debates should be welcomed, because they resound w procedural arguments used to justify reverse gatek namely that ideas inside the academy have no inherent until they have won the approval of a democratic society.

THERE HAS EMERGED A LARGE literature in recent d on the "bad ideas" coming out of departments that refl left-of-centre domination of the academy. Walter Olson in *Schools for Misrule* (2011) that America's elite law s have become a liability for the nation by hatching such ba as class action lawsuits, the mass release of prison ir court takeovers of school funding, and UN mediation o land claims. More general works about the range of alleg ideas coming forth from campus include Heather MacD *The Burden of Bad Ideas* (2000), which centres on various on poverty, science, and the family; Richard Posner's *Pu tellectuals* (2001), which centres on law, philosophy ar nomics; and Gad Saad's *The Parasitic Mind* (2020). Alo the recent contribution by John M. Ellis, *The Breakdown* er Education (2020), these authors generally focus their e on reforming the academy itself. Posner, for instance, con that the best way to deal with bad ideas was to create dis

"Over here, son, not on me head!"

:king systems of the interventions by academics in the ld.

dea of reverse gatekeeping differs from these treatments it aims to block the influence of the university rather ing to reform it from within. Since university trustees en unable to steer the academy from the lected representatives must seize the to speak. From a policy perspective, ts bad academic ideas rather like infec- eases, to which the first response is pro- neasures while eradication is at best a m policy aim. A further argument in policy effectiveness parallels the story tes: universities will reform themselves en they find that the ideas they seed in dents and programmes are blocked by atic society. This will create incentives nts and students to seek out depart- nd programmes that have an estab- ack-record of real world engagement cess. As with *The Clouds*, the exiling of c sophistry can help it to recover.

When the academy endorses flawed works that make no pretence to be objective, it should not be surprised when society steps in

WHILE THE REGULATORY POLICY tools of the Trump executive order is one means of reverse gatekeeping, other tools might be more efficient. In particular, organisational and informational tools of government can erate knowledge sites that provide alternatives to the am academic ideas. The reorganisation of public edu- allow school choice, for instance, is an example of the ganisational tools (with strong informational depend- promoting rival ideas.

policy process, there is always a danger that populist gatekeeping will merely replace one sort of bad ideas ther. The attempt in 2020 to reimpose affirmative action n California by means of a ballot initiative, for instance, n's simultaneous adoption by ballot initiative of magic ms despite widespread expert concerns, show that re- ekeeping does not solve the problem of bad ideas, but ises the procedural question of how to choose ideas Representative democracy, because of its many levels y and accountability, may be a preferable route.

is no guarantee that a democratic society will always be claims by scholars that the excellent ideas circulating s are being blocked by nefarious forces have more of- evidence of reasonable policy differences rather than fic breakdown. In 2011, for instance, the Harvard polit- ce professor Stephen Walt wrote an article in *Foreign* gazine with the title "Where Do Bad Ideas Come From, Don't They Go Away?" His catalogue of "bad ideas" the idea that the United States and its allies in the free ve a right and sometimes a responsibility to remove egimes that threaten the lives of their own citizens or those of other countries; that Western colonialism was always a disaster; that the US embargo on Cuba since 1960 has been a failure; and that there is no room for scepticism on drastic policies in response to human-induced climate change.

One can surely agree with Walt's conclusion that the world would be better off if intellectuals were "wary of firmly entrenched conventional wisdoms" and were taught to "relentlessly question our own judgments" through "vigorous, unfettered, yet civil debate". The question is whether those conditions are more nearly met at Harvard Yard or in a free, pluralistic, and contentious democratic society.

IF THE VERY MEANING of democratic society is at stake, then efforts at reverse gatekeeping that seek to protect a lively and positive understanding of democratic society seem to hold a special place in this repertoire. Another of the Trump administration's late executive orders, Executive Order 13958 of 2 November, 2020, established a President's Advisory 1776 Commission intended to rescue the study of American history from "critical" scholarship. "In recent years, a series of polemics grounded in poor scholarship has vilified our Founders and our founding," it stated. "This radicalised view of American history lacks perspective, obscures virtues, twists motives, ignores or distorts facts, and magnifies flaws, resulting in the truth being concealed and history disfigured."

In addition to ensuring American history was presented accurately at national sites and through federal government operations, the commission would "advise agencies on prioritising the American founding in Federal grants and initiatives" including the "Department of Education, through the American History and Civics Academies and American History and Civics Education National Activities".

The politicisation of national history teaching is of course as old as the modern state itself. It is also an uncomfortable and unfamiliar spectacle in the West, which has long prided itself on a critical examination of its past. Yet when the academy begins to endorse flawed works such as those of the historian Howard Zinn, author of the bestselling *A People's History of the United States*, or the *New York Times*'s *1619 Project* that make no pretence of offering objective history, only progressive "narratives", then it should not be surprised when democratic society steps in to exercise its parental role.

Given a reasonable variety of viewpoints that will always circulate in a liberal society, the assumption has been that good ideas will win out over bad ones. Yet with modern Western universities in a state of ideological involution, the vigorous site of contesting ideas is missing. The day when reverse gatekeeping is no longer needed is far off. Until then, democratic leaders will appropriately act to protect freedoms, liberal equality, and virtuous citizenship from ideas in the academy that would destroy the City.

See, the conqu'ring hero come

David Starkey

Faulknor led his men in scaling the walls, escaping death by a miracle

NOT KNOWING ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL very well, and having a break from filming, I decided to have a wander round. One monument in the north transept caught my eye. Sculpted in white marble in the grand Classical tradition and with more than life-size figures, it showed a dying warrior, naked but for an artfully tucked-in *chiton* or tunic, falling into the arms of Neptune while a winged Victory held a wreath over his head with one hand and bore a palm with the other.

"Overblown heroics", I thought. And then I read the inscription. "This monument", it declared, "was erected by the British Parliament to commemorate the gallant conduct of Captain Robert Faulknor" of the frigate *Blanche*, who in January 1795 had taken the French frigate, *La Pique*, "of very superior force". In close combat, the bowsprit of the enemy had come athwart his ship and by lashing it "with his own hands" to his capstan Faulknor had "converted the whole stern of the *Blanche* into one battery".

But then, "in the moment of victory", he'd been "shot through the heart" and died, aged only 32. I paused and (that fashionable word) reevaluated. Overblown heroics perhaps in the sculpture. But surely the real, the humbling thing in the man.

I'D FORGOTTEN ALL ABOUT THIS until the recent launch of *Pantheons: Sculpture at St Paul's Cathedral*. This is a joint project between the history of art department of the University of York and the cathedral to reevaluate (that word again) and reinterpret the sculptures in the cathedral in the light of — and I quote from the official abstract of the research proposal — the "Black Lives Matter, the Rhodes Must Fall and All Monuments Must Fall Movements, and in the wake of the Brexit decision and Trump presidency".

The Project, whose "Principal Investigator" lists his research interests as including "queer theory, critical animal studies and vegan theory, and world systems and complex systems theory", sees the sculptures as "address[ing] some of the ... Empire's most pressing questions, including the status and treatment of slaves, prisoners of war, and native peoples". Imperial "heroes" are even mentioned — though the word is carefully put in raised commas, as something not to be taken seriously.

I can imagine all too clearly what queer theory might make of Faulknor's artfully tucked-in chiton. But what does the rest of this farrago hav with either Faulknor the man or Faulkr monument — apart, that is, from the word bashfully tucked in between its raised comr

For the capture of *La Pique* was not tl such incident in Faulknor's short care previous year, during the attack on the Frenc Indies island of Martinique, he had person his men in scaling the walls of Fort St Lou bamboo ladders, escaping death by a when grapeshot shattered the wooden car box strapped to his waist but left his unharmed. After the capture of the fort he w moted captain on the spot — and the band admiral's flagship saluted him by playin the conqu'ring hero comes" from Handel' *Maccabaeus*:

> See, the conqu'ring hero comes!
> Sound the trumpets! Beat the drums!
> See the godlike youth advance!
> Myrtle wreathes and roses twine
> To deck the hero's brow divine!

There does seem to be a pattern here, there? Within a few weeks of the news of hi reaching England, a "musical interlude" i knor's honour was composed. Entitled the of Captain Faulknor; Or, British Heroism', given its premiere that summer at Covent (The applause was rapturous — especially piece's thunderous climax in the depictior battery of the English frigate's guns, app staged with real ordnance.

THE SOUND OF THAT APPLAUSE, which Faulknor a "British hero" by popular acclai penetrated the walls of Parliament. Indeed, out that the death of Faulknor and the reaction to it was the real origin of the S pantheon. Hitherto, as and when the o required, the House of Commons had Humble Address to the king requesting order, at public expense, the erection of a ment in Westminster Abbey to a naval or commander who had fallen in an importa victorious engagement.

The proposal so to honour Faulknor was and only one to be debated. Its opp rejected it on the principle that only those in "great and general actions" should be me ised; its supporters focused instead on Fa

›e ridiculed by vegans

ss] and daring". In other words, on his per-
roism. After repeated adjustments to the
of the motion to make Faulknor's case ap-
te more to the general rule, heroism won.
ed in turn to the decision to move Faul-
ıd other subsequent monuments from the
overcrowded Abbey to St Paul's; and
o set up a machinery to ensure that the
ıls contributed "to the beauty and orna-
the cathedral. The task was entrusted first
mittee of Royal Academicians and later to
nmittee on Taste", made up of the great
l of English collectors and connoisseurs.
en them the two committees oversaw the
of the core of the St Paul's pantheon. It
of some 31 monuments in high Regency
ıe fallen of the revolutionary wars against
nd it cost the public purse the immense
10,000 or about £3,500 apiece.

EATEST OF THOSE thus memorialised,
elson, combined both the qualities — the
nce of "great and general actions" and
heroism — distinguished in the Faulknor
ut what drove them was the heroic quest.
ıave Nelson's own word for it. Convalescing from malaria aged 18, he had a visionary experience: "A sudden glow of patriotism was kindled within me and presented my King and Country as my patron. 'Well then,' I exclaimed, 'I will be a *hero* and, confiding in Providence, I will brave every danger.' "

Indeed, an important recent study by a German historian goes so far as to identify the status of heroism as a key differentiator between eighteenth-century England and France: the English/British elite learned it at public school; practised it in the army and navy; set it to suitably stirring music by Handel; and rewarded it in glorious death by memorialisation in Westminster Abbey and latterly St Paul's. The French didn't until its febrile revival by the Revolution and Napoleon (compare and contrast the *Marseillaise* with "See, the conqu'ring hero comes").

Neptune and Victory tend to the dying Robert Faulknor in the north transept of St Paul's Cathedral; below, a detail from a printed memorial of Captain Faulknor

WHERE DOES ALL THIS leave the Pantheons Project? In the old days of empirical research ("When the facts change, I change my mind — don't you?"), the Project would have changed its initial approach. The "hero" would come out of his quotation marks; the researchers would even talk to the odd Brexiteer and Make-America-Great-Again Trump supporter for insight into the patriotic eighteenth- and nineteenth-century mind.

But of course they won't. For the Project's criteria aren't hypotheses to be tested by facts but a Procrustean bed of critical theory to which the facts, such as they are, must be fitted, however uncomfortably.

Expect therefore a "critical animal studies and vegan theory" reinterpretation of "The Roast Beef of Old England" and be grateful. After all, it's only going to cost £800,000 of public money. Back in the nineteenth century you'd have got a whole Pantheon for that. Now we're promised some fancy labels, a bit of computer-generated virtual reality and a documentary or two on BBC4.

But then we're so much better than our ancestors, aren't we?

Fundragers splash the cas

The money being poured into US elections is soaring — but it's often wasted

By Oliver Wiseman IN WASHINGTON

THE THING ABOUT BIG NUMBERS IS that they can always get bigger. In 2020, the already gargantuan sums involved in American politics ballooned. According to the Center for Responsive Politics, an organisation that tracks money in politics, a whopping $14 billion was spent on federal elections this cycle. That's not just a record amount, but more than double the figure from four years ago. Joe Biden became the first presidential candidate to raise more than a billion dollars. In total, slightly under half of the headline figure was spent on the presidential race and the rest was poured into the battle for the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Nine of the ten most expensive Senate races in US history took place this cycle. Collectively, those nine races cost around $2 billion. In the most expensive, in North Carolina, candidates and outside organisations racked up a tab of more than $300 million. Thanks to two runoff contests in Georgia in January to determine control of the Senate, that record may stand for only a few months.

This was the most financially lopsided election in American history

What's striking about campaign finance in 2020 isn't just the size of the sums involved, but also how little they appear to get you in return. Michael Bloomberg was in the race for the Democratic nomination for only 100 days but nonetheless managed to burn through $1 billion. In return, the businessman and former New York mayor received just 59 delegates (Biden received 2,687) and won in just one territory, American Samoa (where 351 people voted). Later in the year, Bloomberg's losing streak continued: he poured $100 million into Biden's unsuccessful effort to turn Florida blue. Tom Steyer, another billionaire, also self-funded a bid for the Democratic nomination. His $350 million bought him airtime in important states — and zero delegates.

It wasn't just plutocrats on an ego trip. Many of those big ticket senate races ended in defeat for the better-funded candidate. In Kentucky, Democratic challenger Amy McGrath had $88 million to spend in her effort to unseat the mild-mannered *bête noire* of the left, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, who managed to raise "just" $55 million. In South Carolina, Democrat Jamie Harrison raised $107 million, $35 million more than Repu incumbent Lindsey Graham. In North Carolina, Democ Cunningham raised more than double his Republican op Thom Tillis. The funding gap in Maine, between Sara Gi Democrat, and Susan Collins, the Republican incumbe even wider. In each of these races, the Democrat los sometimes in spectacular fashion: McConnell beat McG 20 points.

✪ ✪ ✪ ✪ ✪

AWAY FROM THESE HIGH-PROFILE FLOPS, things clear-cut. Across the Senate races as a whole, the better-candidate won 72 per cent of the time. But that figure isn' pressive as it sounds. In uncompetitive races out of the n spotlight, the heavily-favoured incumbent will general spend a long-shot challenger. In fact, whether a candidate more money than their opponent hasn't been so weakly c ed to that candidate's chance of winning for 20 years.

The high-profile demonstration that no one — not ev chael Bloomberg! — can buy an election in America has sc led to much reflection about the assumptions people mak contrary. For all the many ways in which 2 proved that US democracy is not "for sale", miliar narrative about money in politics no less appears to have survived this cycle.

Even as ever-greater sums are squand unsuccessful campaigns, the consensus the candidates asking for, and spending, cash is that money in politics is a siniste When Donald Trump was a self-funded p candidate in 2016, he described Political Committees (PACs), the organisations th and spend so much of the money in American politics, as ble things" and made much of the fact that, unlike his opp he did not have to answer to any donors. Four years on, h none of his own money in his re-election bid.

Biden, who has just benefitted from the most expensiv paign in American history, has promised to sign camp nance reform into law as president. Incoming vice-presid mala Harris, an assiduous fundraiser with close ties to tech titans of her home state of California, has bemoa amount of money swilling around in the system. Dur Democratic primary, progressive Massachusetts Senato beth Warren pledged not to take "a dime of PAC money

:he nomination. Then Persist
ɜnt tens of millions of dollars
ɜ ads for Warren in crucial
a U-turn she justified be-
ıll the men in the race" were
elped by PACs. Girl power!
aps the biggest irony of the
f America's rapidly-escalat-
tical fundraising arms race is
nocrats' dominant position.
vake of the Supreme Court's
rk 2010 decision in *Citizens*
that relaxed restrictions on
gn contributions, Demo-
sumed that the playing field
v tilted in the Republicans'

President Trump spent none of his own money this time

Many on the left worried that the ruling would, as then
ıt Obama put it, "open the floodgates to special interests".
ɔ *York Times* warned that the decision would "thrust pol-
k to the robber-baron era of the 19th century".
'ears on, these warnings have aged disastrously. It's now
'ats who consistently have the upper hand: this was the
ıancially lopsided election in American history. (Even if
ıore the contributions of billionaire candidates like
erg, the Democratic advantage persists.) Meanwhile, it
e difficult to characterise the last decade as a time when
ɜe interests have dominated election spending, let alone
ɜir preferred election results. It is disrupters like Donald
ınd Bernie Sanders, not corporate stooges, that have set
ıing in recent years.

✪ ✪ ✪ ✪ ✪

THESE POOR PREDICTIONS POINT TO A bigger misconception when it comes to money and American politics. Campaign donations are widely seen as investments on which those writing the cheques expect a return. But, as an influential 2003 paper by three MIT academics points
mpaign contributions really were ways in which special
could buy favours, then one would expect the sums in-
ı be far higher. Under the provocative title "Why is there
noney in US politics?", the authors solve this puzzle by
hat "campaign contributing should not be viewed as an
ɜnt, but rather as a form of consumption — or, in the lan-
politics, participation."
ɜstood as consumption, the large sums involved in the
ɜtion make much more sense. Half of all the funds raised
ump campaign came in the form of donations of $200 or
Biden, the figure was around a third. What did people
return for those small sums? Even for those contribut-
than a few hundred dollars, the idea that this buys any
eatment is risible.
ır the megadonors at the other end of the spectrum, like
rg and Steyer, or casino magnate Sheldon Adelson who
hundreds of millions to Republican candidates, the big cheques are still best understood as a form of participation: the thrill of involvement at the highest levels and the conviction that you are using your wealth to save America from socialism/fascism (delete according to party preference).

✪ ✪ ✪ ✪ ✪

THE WELL-FUNDED LOSSES in Senate races underscore the point. For example, if Democratic strategists could have chosen exactly where to spend the cash, they would not have poured so much into the hopeless effort to unseat McConnell. But that prospect, however unrealistic, proved an irresistible lure for fired-up middle-class Democrats. With just a few clicks, they could issue a $20 middle finger to one of their political villains.

It's called "fundraging" and it's a bipartisan phenomenon. In doomed challenges to high-profile left-wingers like New York congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and fellow member of the so-called "squad" Ilhan Omar, little-known Republican candidates out-raised colleagues running in more competitive but less exciting races.

None of this is to deny that low-level corruption and all-purpose swampiness exist: bungs in exchange for favours, an unspoken expectation that some contributions come with strings attached. But these are unconvincing explanations for the ever-increasing amounts of money involved in US elections — a trend that is a symptom, not a cause, of America's broken politics.

More and more is being spent because hyper-engaged citizens — some rich, some poor — believe it when they are told that "this is the most important election in history" and want to do their part in this battle for the future of American democracy. Every day, millions of Americans receive text messages and emails claiming to be from one of their political heroes. ("I need YOU to defend our Election! We can't let Dems destroy America," read the message I received from "Pres. Trump" today.)

Chalking up America's political problems to the shady and corrosive role of money is a conveniently simple diagnosis of America's problems. Blaming sinister billionaires and shady corporate interests for the rancorous state of US politics is a way of avoiding more difficult questions.

Will the sums get even bigger in 2024? Who knows? But the answer to that question will be a good indicator of the health of the system. If 2020's record numbers are surpassed, America's problems have probably worsened, with the country locked in another all-out hyperpolarised "most important election in history". If, however, the numbers start to tail off, it will mean the country is a little less politically engaged — and a little saner — than it was in 2020.

Oliver Wiseman is US editor of The Critic

A measured appraisal of the President's foreign policy would find he was consistent, traditional, multilateral — and highly successful

The triumph of the Trump doctrine

By Bartle Bull

IN THE US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION SEASON of 2016, Peter Navarro, a key international adviser to candidate Donald Trump, set out what a Trump Doctrine would look like in foreign affairs. "Peace through economic and military strength," would be the policy. It was, wrote Navarro, "a page right out of Ronald Reagan's playbook".

Some find Trump's personality distasteful. Others believe that only an outsider with the thick skin of a New York City property developer could bring real change to American politics. Either way, the time for cartoons is behind us. A measured appraisal of the record is due. In foreign policy, Trump was consistent, coherent, traditional, multilateral and highly successful.

Ronald Reagan's presidency is the gold standard for American foreign policy since the Second World War. Jimmy Carter and Barack Obama shared the combination of personal weakness and American self-abnegation that gave the world the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and Isis in 2014. Bill Clinton and George H. W. Bush will retain their current judgment by history, as middling pragmatists. When George W. Bush left office in 2009, Iraq — his main foreign policy legacy — was on the path to significant success as a stable-enough American ally at peace with its neighbours, gushing cheap oil and embracing the ballot box.

From the first President Bush onward, every one of Trump's predecessors handled China exactly wrong. Regardless of party, they embraced the absurdity that a strong and rising communist China would be a "responsible stakeholder", to use the George W. Bush administration's expression when the People's Republic was ushered into the World Trade Organisation in 2001, in a liberal world order. This wishful thinking, visibly ridiculous since the Tiananmen massacre and operating everywhere against the interests of the free world, was the greatest strategic error by the Western democracies since the 1930s.

If peace-through-strength was Trump's strategic doctrine, America First was the strategy itself. It was successful because America is exceptional.

Bartle Bull's next book is a history of Iraq

NATIONAL INTEREST IS THE ONLY STANDARD for judging the success or failure of a foreign policy. Some countries are so important that distinctions be the national and the global interest are relatively slight. the connection, for Reagan and Trump, between "peac "strength". The more benign the hegemon — the more it er es freedom, eschews empire, and desires fair trade — th this will be true. What is good for America is good for the and vice-versa. For an imperialist, race-based hegem communist China, coercive and contemptuous down DNA, the opposite is generally true.

Reviewed dispassionately, Trump's achievements on t eign stage compare favourably with those of Reagan's firs and are historic by the standards of the lesser characte followed. The world will always have its second- and thirc troublemakers. Today these range from Vladimir Putin d scale through the Erdogans and Kims of the world to the and Maduros. Trump has handled these as pragmatically would expect from a man of his background. What really r are the bigger challenges, the great strategic issues. In the ty-first century what this means for America is China.

China

TRUMP'S MOST PROFOUND INTERNATIONAL ACHIEVI has been to bring into the sunlight the key foreign affairs t our era: for peoples everywhere who would be free, Chi threat analogous to that of the USSR in the 1950s and 196

Xi Jinping's Chinese Communist Party is the foe of the sphere, Europe, and our allies in Asia and elsewhere. W speaks of China taking "centre stage" once more, the hi centrality he refers to is that of the Middle Kingdom. This Chinese global hegemony, with Heaven above and the re below. When Xi speaks of the New Era, it is one in wh Party controls, in its own words, "everything, everywhere

These fundamental aims are incompatible with the ex of free societies and sovereign nations. There is no point ther pretense that cheaper underwear and cellphone have been worth the broken towns and cities of the peop built our homes and fought our wars.

Of the major figures in Anglophone politics today, stands alone in having understood and articulated the th at least twenty years. As President, he has done a gre about it, much of which will endure. His China accor ments alone, even without his historic remaking of the East, make Trump a Reagan-level figure.

l enemy: President Donald
s welcomed to China by
nt Xi Jinping, 2017

ıard-nosed outlook at the heart of Trump's China posi-
; been his foreign policy touchstone since at least the
)n CNN in 1987 he declared himself "tired of watching
:ople ripping off the United States".
nake our allies pay their fair share," he told Oprah Win-
next year. A decade later, back on CNN, he hit the same
and spoke specifically of the presidency: "The workers,"
"are the ones that truly like me. I want to run one term,
nt to do the job right."
00, Trump wrote *The America We De-*
ıe of the more prophetic policy docu-
ıf the new millennium. "Our biggest
m challenge will be China," he wrote.
ı we have the upper hand, we're way too
please the Chinese. We see them as a
l market ... even at the expense of our
onal interests."
ame year the US Senate, with Joe Biden
ıding the Democratic side of the effort
ıg minority member of the Foreign Re-
ommittee, voted 85-13 to approve Chi-
ermanent Normal Trade Relations. A
:, Biden, now chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations
:ee, led the US delegation to Beijing that brought China
NTO.
:sident, Trump put his pioneering China insights into
ıe harbinger was his administration's National Security
(NSS), produced in 2017, which for the first time made
: competition" with China the primary national securi-
n of the United States.

F THE ACTION HAS COME on the trade front. The mis-
e of 2000-2001, called by President Clinton a "hundred-
:al," was just that: a dramatically skewed bargain, but skewed in China's favour. Soon enough the backbone working communities of America had been hollowed out. An aggressive geopolitical foe had grown strong on their carcasses. The careful, American-designed and American-funded postwar multilateral architecture — Bretton Woods, the United Nations, the WTO and more — had been coopted from within, rendered moot and meaningless. Vital supply chains and the entire intricate ecosystems of production that sustain them had been offshored — not to friends like Mexico or India, but to a Communist Party devoted to ending the free Judaeo-Christian way of life.

Trump's key insight on trade was so obvious it seemed radical only in a sadly corrupted world

By 2014 China had started building military islands with impunity in vital trade lanes. Everyone was too afraid to do anything about it. The disaster of which Trump alone warned had now came to pass, and the reaction to it made Trump president.

Trump's key insight on trade was so obvious that it seemed radical only in a sadly corrupted world. Access to the American market is the largest prize in global commerce and finance. So if the US wants something from a trading partner, all Washington has to do is ask firmly. In 2018 Trump put tariffs on many Chinese imports, made America's demands, raised the tariffs when the demands were unmet, and then removed some of the tariffs when various demands were met. There was no price, no retribution. Voilà, Phase One. Some Trump tariffs remain, ranging between 7.5 per cent and 25 per cent on $370 billion of annual Chinese imports. The next administration will not, politically, be able to remove these without further concessions from China.

FROM TAIWAN, TO THE ASIAN SHIPPING LANES, to Beijing-captured multilaterals like the World Health Organisation

and the Paris climate framework, to dangerous technology exporters like TikTok and Huawei, Trump has consistently shown that communist China can successfully be countered on numerous other fronts. Carrie Lam, the CCP's "chief executive" in Hong Kong, found the international banking system so thoroughly closed by US sanctions that she recently revealed she was taking her $672,000 salary in cash.

This is American power. The only shame is in not using it to the full. Trump picked his battles, and conducted them far more peacefully than his predecessors. It should not be so remarkable when an American president understands the difference in importance between China and Syrian Kurdistan.

With China, Trump's achievement has essentially been to call the new Cold War into the open. A new US Administration, even one like Biden's of the globalist pro-Chinese left, will find it difficult to retreat fully to Obama-era appeasement.

A European visit last September by the Chinese foreign minister ended with the German foreign minister publicly defending his Czech colleague from high-handed threats by Xi's emissary. In the US Congress, Chuck Schumer and Nancy Pelosi, the leftist Speakers of the Senate and House, are both now forced to talk like China hawks. Justin Trudeau of Canada, paragon of anti-Trumpist Davos-man globalism, has locked up a Huawei executive on extradition charges related to espionage, and now accuses Beijing of "aggressive coercive diplomacy". Even Biden now says his sole big difference from Trump on China will be to work more with American "allies" for "collective leverage".

Trump has concluded trade agreements with South Korea and Japan. He has a new trade deal with Mexico and Canada that even Biden says is "better than Nafta". Twice in November, including on election day, the "Quad" (Japan, India, Australia and the US, known as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) conducted naval exercises in Asian waters for the first time since before the Obama administration.

Either Xi stops the drumbeat of ugly behavior, or the Trump-led multilateral and bipartisan resistance to the CCP entrenches and grows. Either way, the new Cold War is now "official", as it should be. This is lasting and fundamental change, effected by one man, on by far the most important foreign affairs matter of our era.

North Korea

CLOSELY RELATED TO THE CHINA FILE is North Korea. Washington's basic North Korean policy was settled for decades when Bill Clinton essentially ratified Pyongyang's nuclear programme with his toothless Agreed Framework in October, 1994. Clinton had sent as his emissary none other than Jimmy Carter. The signal was unmistakable: Clinton was not at all serious about preventing a nuclear North Korea.

Under the Agreed Framework, Pyongyang's programme — initiated by the Soviets in 1963 — proceeded through its first announced weapons test in 2006. This test was probably a failure, leaving the window for action still open, but the George W. Bush administration, busy in Iraq and Afghanistan, failed to do anything about it. Three successful tests during the Obama administration led to no US response at all, with the result that time Trump came to office North Korea had long since ac its goal of confirmed nuclear impunity.

North Korea's last test, in November, 2017, ten montl Trump came to office, presented an effective argument can hit any city in the US with a nuclear warhead. The m West can now achieve with Kim Jong Un is a bargain, economic sunshine for the nuclear weapons, but with tl regime comfortable domestically, the North Koreans need it. Trump's historic diplomacy with his "good friend Rocket Man, and the greater credibility of his threats Pyongyang resume its provocations, did as much as hoped, and far more than his predecessors: stopped the r testing and the missile flights.

The Middle East

TRUMP'S ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE Middle East will prc rable. Biden has staffed his foreign policy team with Obar sonnel, but they will not be able to re-create their agre providing American cover and funding for a nuclear progr that was leading Tehran into a near-certain conflict. N they revive the senseless, cynical Palestinian veto over p for the region.

Trump has left a bankrupt and domestically unpopul ran regime alone at the Star Wars bar with Hamas, Hez Assad, and certain outdated Iraqi militias. No amount of nostalgia can make this isolation go away.

The US has traditionally had two main interests in the East: oil and Israel. So here was a region of great strategic tance, and yet it was characterised by seemingly intr problems. Trump's solution was masterful. First, through sive deregulation-led domestic oil and gas boom, he ac US energy independence. With Trump's US the largest carbons producer on earth and exporting energy, the East simply does not matter as it used to. Here indeed is through-strength, with economic strength coming f

"I'm exempt from mask-wearing due to an underlined health issue..."

ole peace? Trump with president
Rivlin and prime minister
in Netanyahu on a visit to Israel

said from the start. In October 2019, a swarm of Iranian n-guided missiles and $15,000 drones temporarily de- half of Saudi oil production capacity. Before Trump's evolution, this would have been an attack on American ods, demanding a robust reprisal. The response of the irsty Hitlerian lunatic in the White House? Nothing. No interest had been damaged. The Saudis lly asked for additional US troops and nces. Trump sent them, announcing, rabia, at my request, has agreed to pay verything we're doing." This was, as he typical understatement, "a first".

Swiftly and cheaply, Trump has done what the bipartisan establishment failed to do: deliver Arab-Israeli peace

ATICALLY, THE TRUMP administra- achieved a second, equally historic rea- t in the Middle East. Swiftly and cheap- p has done what the entire bipartisan olicy establishment has tried and failed he Middle East for decades. He has de- rab-Israeli peace.

7, Trump flew directly from Riyadh to Tel Aviv, another Abraham Accords, embodying peace between Israel JAE, began last August. Then Bahrain, a satellite of Sau-, signed up. In October, Israel and Lebanon, officially at e 1948, opened maritime border talks. Then Sudan, nlike the UAE and Bahrain had actually fought Israel ed up to the Arab League's "Three Noes" (no peace, no on, no negotiation), signed a peace with Tel Aviv. In De- Morocco followed suit.

vember, Israeli prime minister Bibi Netanyahu quietly audi Arabia with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. d Jordan are already at peace with Israel. None of the recent accords are conceivable without Saudi encouragement. De facto peace between the Jewish government in Jerusalem and the guardians of Mecca and Medina has been established.

"There will be no separate peace between Israel and the Arab world ... without the Palestinian process and Palestinian peace," then-secretary of state John Kerry said, a month before Trump's inauguration. In truth, corrupt and tiny Palestine did not matter at all to the real world of forward-facing Arab leaders. Trump understood this. He also understood that Iran was the common enemy that would bring the Arabs and Israelis together.

"Middle East peace" is foreign-affairs parlance for, specifically, the relations between Israel and the Arab world. If anything has ever deserved a Nobel Peace Prize, it is Trump's rendering redundant the vast, self-perpetuating Palestine Industrial Complex in the world's think-tanks, faculty lounges and chancelleries.

Trump's other achievements in the Middle East and Muslim Eurasia are significant: rolling back US intercessions in Afghanistan and Syria; defeating the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt; reversing the Obama diffidence on Isis and instead swiftly crushing the caliphate; liquidating the terrorist leaders Abu Bakr al Baghdadi and Qassem Suleimani; withdrawing from an Iran deal that, like Clinton's Framework Agreement with North Korea had the sole practical result of paying, hastening, and emboldening the other side.

Compared to Trump's strategic coups in the Middle East, these subsidiary achievements are, like his brokering of the Kosovo-Serbia peace and the Egypt-Ethiopia de-escalation, mostly tactical in scope. But they are larger and more numerous than the mid-level Middle East achievements of any previous US president, and reflect a coherent strategy based on conserving US power, backing US allies, and defending the principle of national sovereignty.

Hispanic Americans

TRUMP'S HISTORIC ELECTORAL SUCCESS in 2020 among Americans of Hispanic background was mirrored by significant diplomatic successes for his administration in Latin America itself. Since his election in 2016, pro-Trump presidents have been elected in the region's two key countries, Mexico and Brazil. As a result of Trump's diplomacy, nearly 30,000 Mexican troops have been deployed to prevent illegal northerly movement across Mexico's southern and northern borders. As Trump promised,

this means that Mexico is indeed paying for "the wall". In 2019, Trump's diplomacy delivered bilateral agreements with the "northern triangle" countries of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador to keep and process foreign asylum seekers claiming to have escaped persecution in their home countries.

Britain

BRITAIN IS AMERICA'S MOST IMPORTANT ALLY and this is so for reasons that will exist as long as the two countries exist: a shared political culture based on the three interlocking pillars of Anglo-Saxon governance: individual liberty, the rule of law, and representative democracy.

Continental Europe possesses no tradition of any of these, and the project of the European Union reflects this. Britain is inherently mercantile, outward-looking, and free in its approach to trade, with the Commonwealth and CANZUK Anglosphere to prove it. Europe is inward-looking, backward-looking, and inherently protectionist. The British people made their choice for an optimistic, global future in the Brexit vote of 2016, and then handed Boris Johnson an 80-seat majority to effect it.

When Barack Obama told the British people that their 2016 vote for sovereignty would put them "at the back of the queue" with the US, the message was one of deeply undiplomatic contempt. Trump, the man who returned to the Oval Office the bust of Winston Churchill that Obama had removed, put America's leading ally back where she belongs: at the front of the queue.

The Anglo-American alliance represents the longest, most important, and most positive bilateral cooperation in history. Its denigration under Obama, which Hillary Clinton would have continued, was a radical act. Restoring the special relationship, with its spectacular contributions to the broader world as well as to the two countries, has been a signal achievement of Trump's foreign policy.

Russia

RUSSIA IS IN THE DEATH SPIRAL OF NATIONS. Its people are unhappy and dying, its easy oil is beginning to run out, a markets do not want to invest in its more difficult oil. But cal will, as they say, is the greatest "force multiplier" of a Vladimir Putin has it, plus nuclear weapons and cunning. remains an important second-order player.

On pure policy, Trump has been far tougher on Mosco any president since Reagan, selling lethal weapons to U imposing sanctions that have crippled vital energy inves killing hundreds of quasi-official Russian mercenaries ir aggressively increasing military cooperation with borde from the Baltic to Poland, massively boosting Nato d budgets, going after Putin cronies with the Magnitsky Ac expelling scores of Russian "diplomats".

Trump's Russia policy is squarely within traditional U duct towards second-order irritants: Theodore Roo "speak softly and carry a big stick". The big stick is the ur dented measures he has taken to counter, punish, and v the Kremlin. The "speak softly" part is Trump's personal macy towards Putin. Keeping the door open, so to speak, sound judgment: Russia's cooperations with China and I as vulnerable as any other arrangements based on l among thieves, and Russia is a natural ally on the fror against aggressive Sunni Islam.

Trump is the opposite of a unilateralist. He is an arder eralist and — where the situation is right, as with the NAI placement or the Quad in Asian waters — a frequent mul alist. Nato is an example of his commitment to multilate when it suits American interests. Trump devoted signific sources to rescuing it, saving a 71-year-old body founde threat — Soviet Communism — that no longer exists.

TRUMP REASONABLY ASKED THE NATO ALLIES to "pa share" if the alliance was to survive with any meaning. T sponded: 2020 defence spending by non-US Nato memb about $313 billion, a 23 per cent increase over the average Obama. US defence spending rose 8 period during the pe massive increase that largely kept Trump's promise to America's own military.

Trump's rearmament of the core defence organisatior free world amounted to an additionap $109 billion per a (These calculations use 2015 dollars.) There is ultimate more one could say about peace-through-strength, or for multilateralism and alliances, than this.

As Trump made clear in winning the presidency, a reb economy would be as important as a rebuilt US military Trump Doctrine of peace-through-strength. At this tir year, the big story was the fruits of Trump's return to trac American economic virtues.

His tax cuts, trade deals and regulatory reform had probably the strongest economy in US history. After dec stagnation, the core measure of American economic heal median household incomes, had risen 10 per cent in onl years to by far the highest level ever. Unemployment, at cent, was its best in 50 years. Then, for the man who bl whistle on communist China, came the virus from Wuha

"She's doing Couch to 5G."

'nfixing Parliament

ɟovernment's attempt ɟain the right to call an ion is problematic

AN PARLIAMENT REVIVE a prerogative power? And can it prevent the courts from questioning a dissolution of parliament? These seemingly questions lie at the heart of the nent's latest attempt to rebalance ish constitution in its favour.

re the Fixed-term Parliaments Act sed in 2011, the prime minister ormally call a general election at e by simply advising the sovereign lve parliament. Under a convention after Sir Alan "Tommy" Lascelles, secretary to George VI, the monarch fuse if another MP could command idence of the Commons.

his was still a valuable weapon in ıe minister's armoury — until David n surrendered it to the House of ns as part of his coalition agree- th the Liberal Democrats.

ite its name, the 2011 act does ıe term of a parliament at five because MPs can vote for an ıeral election. Theresa May l the required two-thirds majority out her successor failed on three ıs in 2019. Boris Johnson lly secured legislation to by-pass irement, leading to an election at of that year.

rliament is paralysed, so is ıcy," said Chloe Smith, a Cabinet inister, last month. Describing act as a "shoddy law" even he had voted for it, Smith legislation made it hold a general election e government needed a ıdate.

raft bill, if enacted, would ost of the 2011 act. As parliament would e years unless e minister ı earlier dissolution — which could be granted by the sovereign under the royal prerogative. Clause 2 of the draft bill says that the prerogative powers that were exercisable before the law was changed "are exercisable again, as if the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 had never been enacted".

Sir Alan Lascelles

THIS IS A CURIOUS THING to do. Parliament often replaces broad common law powers, developed and enforced by judges over the centuries, with precise statutory provisions. But doing it the other way round is unprecedented — not least because it's seen as undemocratic to give anyone a power that is ill-defined and effectively unconstrained. It's not clear, for example, whether the prerogative allows the sovereign to insist on a dissolution to resolve a constitutional crisis.

Indeed, there has been some doubt over whether it is possible to restore the vestige of a monarchical power. Some academics argue that, once abolished, the prerogative is lost for ever: it does not revive if the legislation that abolished it is itself repealed. Others say that a prerogative power that has been superseded by statute merely lies dormant.

Can parliament can give it the kiss of life — even if some of its features may be a little out-of-focus? As a matter of legal logic, legislators cannot create a new prerogative power. Can they revive an old one? If you take the view that parliament can do anything, the answer must be yes. But two parliamentary committees advised the government last September that a new statutory power would be less vulnerable to legal challenge.

That's something the draft bill seeks to avoid. Clause 3 says "a court of law may not question the exercise or purported exercise" of the powers relating to the dissolution of parliament. Nor can a court question "any decision or purported decision relating to those powers, or the limits or extent of those powers".

In explanatory notes, the government says the "long-standing position is that the exercise of the prerogative power to dissolve parliament is not justiciable". It cites the well-known GCHQ case, decided in 1984.

But things have moved on. In 2019, the prime minister advised the Queen to prorogue parliament for five weeks. That advice was challenged by Gina Miller, among others. Their claims were about suspending parliament, of course, not dissolving it. But the Supreme Court decided "firmly" that prorogation was justiciable — in the sense that the courts could decide on its limits or extent.

THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT the courts would be prevented from considering by the last phrase in clause 3, the government says. But will this be sufficient to protect a prime minister against another legal challenge? I wouldn't count on it. Judges have a habit of getting round so-called "ouster clauses" if they think a decision-maker has acted unlawfully. And the government has muddied the waters by publishing a new set of principles that appear to override those summarised by Lascelles in 1950.

To endorse the new principles and scrutinise the draft bill, the government has set up a joint committee of MPs and peers. Lord McLoughlin, a Conservative peer and former minister, was elected chairman just two weeks after making his maiden speech in the upper house. His committee will report by the end of February and legislation is expected to follow.

That will allow Downing Street to choose the date of the next general election — a considerable advantage. Unless, like Theresa May in 2017 and others before her, the prime minister picks the wrong time to go to the country.

Moral boundaries are being eroded by the rise of sex robots that claim to be "the perfect companion"

Love in the electronic age

by Josephine Bartosch

THE THREAT TO HUMANITY FROM ROBOTS is real, but our new mechanical overlords won't come from an advanced alien civilisation: we will invite them into our homes. As servants or sex toys, robots will come packaged as a cure for loneliness or sold to us as devices to reduce crime. The investment driving robotics is largely split between the military and masturbation tools for men; and arguably it is the latter which risks destroying civilisation.

Realbotix, a leader in the field of sex technology, claims to have created the world's first sex robot, Harmony. Despite years of development, Harmony is still in its infancy; unable to stand or support its own weight. Rather than a convincing copy of a woman, it is essentially an animatronic Barbie with wifi enabled party tricks and penetrable orifices. With a stilted, artificial voice, it says in a promotional video, "I was created to be a perfect companion." The words reflect a troubling ambition: far from being simple sex toys, it seems Harmony's developers anticipate the use of robots as a replacement for interpersonal relationships.

From the erotic charge of Maria in Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis* to the alabaster skin of Pygmalion's statue Galatea, the idea of a compliant object to reflect men's desires is a quirk of male psychology that has surfaced throughout the ages. At present the sex robot hovers somewhere between the porn-fuelled fantasies of technologists and science fiction, but the ethical implications of the use of sex robots demand immediate attention.

It's easy to laugh about socially awkward men forming pseudo-relationships with inanimate lumps of moulded silicon, but what this trend says about society's view of women is troubling. In *Sex and Love with Robots* (2007) David Levy argues that human relationships can be replaced by those with machines, and that sex can consist of just one person's will.

His narrative is stripped of some important context: the number of women who pay for sexual services is so small that reliable data is hard to find, whereas it is estimated that in the US around 6 per cent of men pay for sex in any one year. This is reflected in those who purchase sex dolls and robots: male versions are available but they are bought overwhelmingly by men. While women might use sex toys, the market for full-body masturbatory aids is almost entirely male.

Jo Bartosch is a writer and campaigner for women's rights

Defending his work against critics acc
him of using the sex industry as a model f
man-robot relations, Levy said in a 201'
"Variety is the primary reason people use
titutes ... this is also the reason people use s
bots." He added, "Humans can enjoy havi
with a partner who has no feeling of love c
pathy for them." The experience of the p
used for sex, or their reasons for consenting
are not considered by Levy. This lop-sided
of sex, as a service to be extracted from pe
relationships and monetised, is shared by
in the field of robotics.

THE RISE IN THE USE OF DOLLS with the proportions o
dren, and the development of childlike robots for masturl
presents a new ethical problem. Speaking at the Interna
Congress on Love and Sex with Robots in 2017, robotics ph
pher Marc Behrendt of ULB University in Brussels arguec
devices could either be seen as "crafty pieces of engin
made up of wires, sensors, motors and equipped with a
mentary AI brain, or on the contrary we can choose to co
them as a symbolic presentation of a human being".

Controversially he suggested: "In practical terms, CSBs
sex bots) could be part of the solution in helping some ver
cific categories of paedophiles overcome or manage thei
ally reprehensible and illegal sexual offences."

Behrendt is not the first to suggest this. A decade ago R
Arkin, director of the mobile robotic lab at Georgia Instit
Technology, suggested the use of childlike dolls for child
ers "on prescription". Arkin has no background in workin
offenders; indeed, his career has largely involved the des
autonomous killing machines. It is telling that the drive f
use of dolls for the simulation of abuse has not been propo
therapists, but by those working in the field of robotics.

Many manufacturers mirror the roboticists' claims, a
their products can reduce harm to children. In an intervi
The Atlantic, Shin Takagi — founder of a Toyko company
manufactures dolls with the proportions of five-year-o
claimed: "We should accept that there is no way to c
someone's fetishes ... I am helping people express their d
legally and ethically. It's not worth living if you have to liv
repressed desire."

The idea that dolls could potentially act as a safety
against would-be offenders committing real acts agains
dren is intriguing but unevidenced. However, the market fo
devices appears to be growing. The Crown Prosecution S
revealed in 2019 that "230 suspected child sex dolls" hac
seized by the Border Force since September 2016.

Professor Kathleen Richardson, who founded the Can
Against Sex Robots, refutes this: "These aren't 'child sex
they are 'child sex-abuse dolls'. Claims they should be put o
scription" to allow a harmless outlet for paedophiles turns
on its head. Child abuse is on the rise because there a
enough brakes on illegal sexual practices on the internet. G

hile a child sex abuse doll is like throw-
ol on a fire."
added: "What's shocking is that these
phers don't argue that racist dolls
be permitted, they selectively apply this
nt to ensure that there's no restriction
sex rights."

GUMENT THAT DOLLS CAN REDUCE
ng only holds if one sees the inclination
children as innate. The notion of "pae-
s" as a sexual minority has further cemented the idea.
-based organisation Prostasia, which has links to aca-
in the UK, takes this a step further, referring to those with
interest in children as "MAPs" or "minor-attracted per-
here is a concerted push for them to be accepted within
er community of sexual minorities. Prostasia advocates
for those who resist their urge to abuse, going so far as to
"no children were harmed in the making of this" kite-
r websites and dolls which replicate child sexual abuse.
evidence however is not clear. While there are a tiny mi-
disturbed people who abuse children from their adoles-
here are many more who go on to view images of child
buse after developing an addiction to pornography. The
sive nature of addiction means consumers who have ex-
the sexual taboos provided by watching adults will seek
al content, often images of child abuse and bestiality.
ed, so pervasive is the problem that in an address to the
Watch Foundation last year Simon Bailey, the National
hiefs' Council lead on child protection, warned: "What
eeing is a new group of young men aged between 18 and
have been brought up on a staple diet of Pornhub and
that. They get to the point where there's no pornograph-
ial that is stimulating them so then they start to explore
ld abuse imagery might look like."
e approach of roboticists such as David Levy inadvert-
ows, it is impossible to separate the development of sex
l robots from the wider sex industry. Internet porn has

Harmony is not a convincing copy of a woman: it is an animatronic Barbie with wifi enabled party tricks

transformed the sexual script, with previously niche practices as strangulation and BDSM becoming normal. Magazines aimed at young women now routinely offer advice on practices common in pornography, with *Teen Vogue* running articles on so-called "breath-play" (choking) and how to reduce pain during anal sex.

THE VAST INCREASE in the number of people seeking out images of child sexual abuse suggest it now features in many adults' sexual fantasies. In the UK the number of images on the police's child abuse image database has risen from fewer than 10,000 in the 1990s to 13.4 million today.

The future we are now living in was predicted. In 1984, Professor Donna Harraway wrote *The Cyborg Manifesto*, a visionary tract in which she argued humanity had entered a new age. Embedded within her theory was the idea that social boundaries would break down, allowing for a fusion of human and machine based upon the "argument for pleasure in the confusion of boundaries."

While it is difficult to share her enthusiasm, in many ways her prediction was right: moral, social and physical boundaries are eroding. The conclusion that this has been driven by technology is unavoidable. With our collective memory outsourced to Google, humans are now merged with the digital world. Arguably, the connections made online have been at the cost of our relationships with one another.

THE CONTENT OF PORNOGRAPHY has become more degrading almost in direct opposition to the gains made by women and protections offered to children in the real world. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that women, and increasingly children, primarily exist online to satisfy the sexual urges of men. Mutuality has given way to narcissistic focus on image, and a solipsistic model of one-sided pleasure. By the time child sex-abuse robots are the new norm, any judgment regarding their use will be reserved for those who urge caution.

We are living in the midst of a technologically-driven sexual revolution. To the generation who have been brought up straddling the online and real worlds, relationships are fraught with risk and dampened by the unfortunate necessity to recognise the human needs and desires of the other person. It is easy to see the appeal of robots for this demographic.

But technology as currently developed is robbing us of what it is to be human, fracturing society and eroding empathy. We must wrestle control back from the technologists who promise yet more objects to fill the human-shaped gap they themselves have dug. Now is the time to look up from our smartphones and face our collective future as human beings.

Alexander Larman questions whether libraries should sell historic manuscripts to solve short-term financial problems

Balancing the books

RICHARD OVENDEN, librarian of the Bodleian in Oxford, recently published an impassioned account of the importance of collections of the written word. In *Burning the Books* (John Murray, £20), he examines the way in which libraries have been pillaged throughout history, from the (exaggerated) destruction of the Great Library of Alexandria to the Nazis systematically laying waste to priceless manuscripts and documents. Ovenden writes: "Throughout history, libraries and archives have been subject to attack. At times, librarians and archivists have risked and lost their lives for the preservation of knowledge."

It is hard not to be stirred by this. Yet at a time where libraries find their finances ever squeezed, the threat of deaccession for necessary financial gain looms large over many collections. The Royal College of Physicians recently found itself mired in controversy for its reported plans to sell off a historic bequest of rare books, worth up to £10 million, to cover a budgetary shortfall. Rugby School went a step further, selling hundreds of books from its library at auction in order to create revenue for bursary funds. The once unthinkable has now happened: great institutions are looking at their libraries not as a near-sacred repository of knowledge but as a source of easy cash in difficult times.

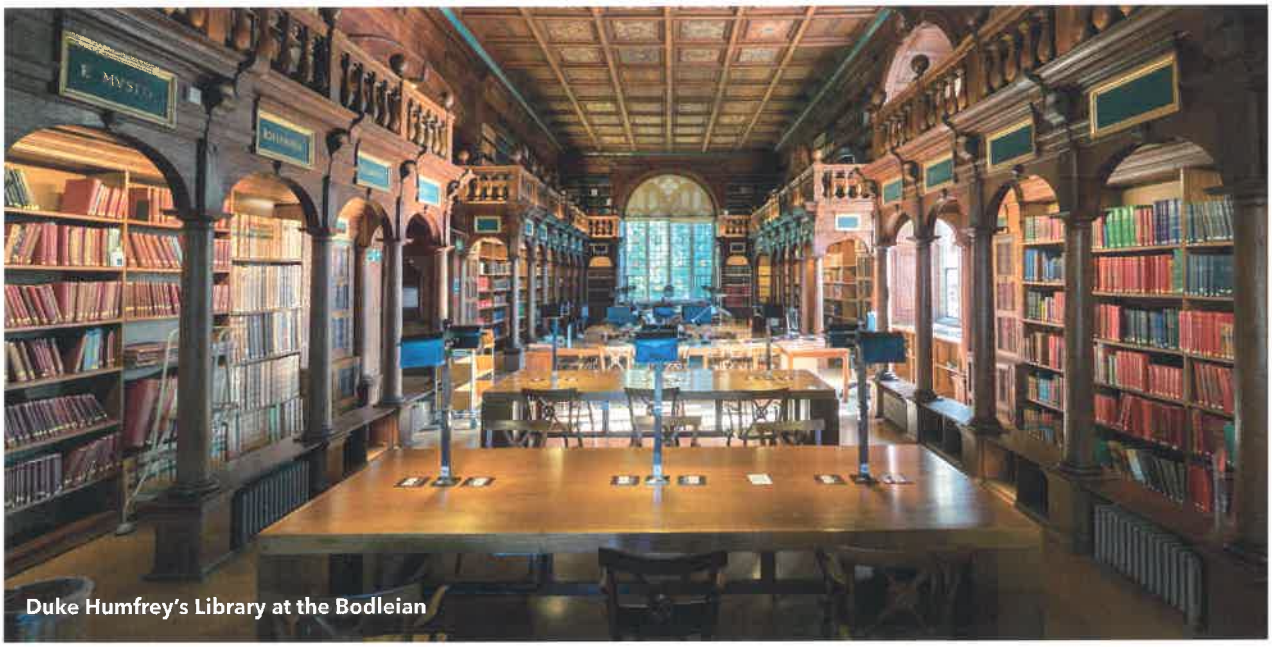
Alexander Larman's latest book is *The Crown in Crisis* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson)

Professor Andrew Goddard, president of the RCP, h tempted to place the college's actions in perspective. H stressed that, contrary to newspaper reports, no sale books from the collection had been decided on, but state due to the loss of income arising from the pandemic, it w ing a significant deficit, and looking at means of raising fur Goddard acknowledged, if a sale was decided upon — an hams has already been consulted as to the value of the items — the Arts Council would have to be informed, an disposal of a donated item would [have to] be consistent terms of donation". His argument is that the valuable book largely non-medical in nature, and therefore surplus to d day requirements for the college. Their sale (should it go a would stabilise the institution at a difficult time.

It seems clear that Goddard is no disinterested party, ju by his open letter on the subject, in which he asks, "Shou RCP sell some of its assets less directly related to its core pu in order to prevent loss of staff, and risk its ability to deli charitable mission?" He concludes: "I believe strongly (an been consistent in this throughout my time with the RC the college is not its buildings or its treasures, but its peopl is the fellowship, the membership, and the staff."

Nonetheless, the membership will be contacted in or canvass their views, and hopefully these will be taken int sideration before a potentially ruinous decision is made. Ju by media coverage, many members are violently oppo such a sale, which incidentally would cost the RCP its stat recognised museum.

Rugby didn't bother to canvass its staff, current or form pils for their opinion. Some, including the author A.N. W were horrified. He described the sale as "terrible", and the nors as "vandals", adding, "I would never dream now of l



Duke Humfrey's Library at the Bodleian

ıg to that school because they would just flog it." When I :ed Rugby, the school seemed bemused that its action be interpreted as anything other than a good deed, ılly since a previous sale of the school's art in 2018 had :15 million for bursary funds.

s told: "Rugby is a school not a museum . . . [and] as a , the school is committed to using its resources to benefit : and future students. The governing body believes that in ɔ do that it was desirable to sell the books and increase ool's bursary provision."

ı though some of the books listed for sale were marked :awn from sale", suggesting that someone had had second ts about the wisdom of their disposal, the school's per- e was that the vast majority — which included an early Shakespeare's plays, a first edition of *A Christmas Carol* important letter from Siegfried Sassoon — did not need :eserved. Its spokesman said: 'The books do not fall with- :cope of the archive collection as they are not related to ory of the school."

THER LEADING PUBLIC SCHOOLS have a rather less blasé attitude towards their libraries' deaccessioning and disposal. Winchester College informed me it had no plans to dispose of rare and valuable books from the Fellows' Library. It has ne so once, when the manuscript of Malory's *Morte d'Ar-* s sold to the British Library for £150,000 in 1976, with the : proviso that the so-called "Winchester manuscript" ɔe made available for scholarship and to the general pub- money raised was used for bursaries.

College said that its collection "is a rare book and man- library of national significance, used regularly in teach- ıians as well as pupils from local state schools. The stew- of its holdings, which includes actively adding to the ɔn, adheres to a formal collection management policy ıg heritage sector standards." Items have, however, been the past: "As at many historic libraries, in past centuries ıen considered duplicates were from time to time sold to e purchase of new acquisitions or exchanged with other s." The college statutes were amended in 2016 to include ;ervation of its collections and historic buildings for the of the public, who can visit its museums and library on s, free of charge.

r major public and private libraries seem unlikely to fol- example set by Rugby and, potentially, the RCP. Richard ıead of governance at the British Library, commented: :tish Library does not sell off books, manuscripts or other : the permanent collection." There are only "limited cir- ıces" in which the Library may deaccession or dispose of ı in the collection, generally in the case of superfluous :es or in the specific circumstances set out in the British Act 1972.

s echoed by the London Library, who said: "While we do :ally have to manage the collection to create space for terial, deaccessioning of parts of the collection to raise

The Bodleian deaccessions only on very rare occasions, says librarian Richard Ovenden

funds is not something the Library is contemplating or forms part of our collections management or fundraising strategy. All our collection remains accessible. The vast bulk of it can be borrowed and the special collection of rare or valuable books is accessible to members under supervision on site."

Given the outcry at the idea of Rugby and the RCP selling off their libraries, it is unsurprising that few other institutions would wish to follow suit. Just as the Royal Academy's proposal to sell Michaelangelo's *Taddei Tondo* in order to preserve staff jobs led to an uproar, it is a brave, or foolhardy, organisation that would openly place a monetary value upon its collection of rare and in many cases irreplaceable books, and license the possibility of further sales in the future.

PERHAPS UNSURPRISINGLY, it has been a long time since the Bodleian has had any kind of sale. Richard Ovenden told me: "We did deaccession 'permanent' collection items in the past, though not for a very long time. There were quite high-profile 'duplicate' sales in the nineteenth century, and occasionally they reappear on the market, with our deaccession stamp on them. This was very common among great libraries during this time but not something we actively have done for a long time. On a more practical level for our books that are used by readers more frequently, we would only withdraw material from stock that was damaged or had been defaced, for example. But in these cases, we would always seek to replace the item if it is still available."

What is the role of the librarian in making such decisions? Ovenden is typically nuanced: "Deaccessioning has always been part of the proper functioning of a library, whether a small personal collection or a great research library. The Bodleian's policy is that we only deaccession on very rare occasions, and never leave Oxford without a last physical copy (where one exists) for preservation purposes."

He himself is temperamentally inclined to keep rather than dispose of books. ("As my own house runs out of walls to put shelves on, it is increasingly clear that this is not a sustainable approach.") Rather, he looks to other libraries to offer an ecumenical approach. "Deaccessioning only works when libraries collaborate. This is where prioritisation comes in, but also collaboration."

Even as the Bodleian remains a sanctuary for rare books under his care, it is a reminder that not all librarians have such an enlightened approach, and we will only be poorer for their short-sighted disposals of their treasures.

A question of taste

***Clive Aslet** says Rex Whistler's Tate mural should be seen more as an ironic Rococo fantasy than the work of a racist*

WHEN IT WAS OPENED IN 1927 the restaurant at Tate Britain was located in what was fatefully called the "most amusing room in Britain". I was taken there as an undergraduate by a Yale professor of liberal views who loved wine. It had in those days an exceptional wine list, with excellent vintages offered at tempting prices, which could be sipped in agreeable surroundings.

The walls were and remain decorated with a continuous mural painted by Rex Whistler, an extraordinary production of the Slade who was 21 when he began. Whistler became famous for a style that ignored Cubism and Surrealism to evoke an imagined past, part Rococo, part Regency, very English, whose nostalgia seems doubly poignant because of his death on his first day of active service with the Welsh Guards on the beaches of Normandy, aged 39.

A black child being pulled on a string

In truth I did not terribly care for the Tate mural, which I found gloomy and baffling — but that was before it was cleaned in 2013. Like most diners, including the politically correct Diane Abbott, I was oblivious of the cause of the brouhaha that now threatens to close it.

The theme of the mural, [as readers of *The Critic* will know,] is an Expedition in Pursuit of Rare Meats. This takes the form of a capriccio, in which a group of young people are shown journeying through the Duchy of Epicuriana on the hunt for good things to eat. They were a little like the Bright Young Things, including Whistler, who would be photographed by Cecil Beaton as shepherds and shepherdesses at Stephen Tennant's Wilsford House. Here is on the face of it a land of enchantment, combining English pastoral, Italy and the China of Willow Pattern plates.

A group punningly called White Pube has recently drawn attention to a black child being pulled on behind a skipping Arcadian young woman and supposedly disrespectful portrayals of the Chinese. How shocked Professor Gould would have been if he'd known. White Pube, which describes itself as the "collaborative identity" of two women who left art school in 2015 and "write about art, video games and food", have labelled the mural as racist and their Twitter following "audibly gasped", according to one post. Following a review, the Tate appears to have decided that the restaurant v longer operate in the basement designed for it, and since t nowhere else for it to move into, it must presumably clos time when all arts organisations are struggling to plug the h their finances made by Covid, the loss of this income strea be unwelcome; unlike most museum restaurants, this one directly by the gallery which therefore takes all the profit. ever, the trustees are prepared to suffer to be pure. The ga ethics committee are "unequivocal in their view that the i ry of the work is offensive".

Clive Aslet is an architectural historian, journalist, novelist and lecturer

HOW COULD THE TINY and — dare o it? — insignificant White Pube have pro this striking reaction? Because it was a in an agony of self-hatred about its c tions. Visitors to last year's William Bla hibition were advised, by a notice at th trance, not to enter if they were likely distressed by scenes of violence. The ca to the recently acquired group portrait Whig Junto, painted by John James Ba 1710, mentions only Lord Oxford amo six Whig grandees represented, alt they ruled the country for a time; th shown with books, papers, collection against a landscape background, all of which might have interpreted.

Instead, half the text is concerned with a black servant lifting a curtain on the far left hand side of the picture. "' not know the identity of the servant," it comments less helpfully, "or even if a Black servant worked in Orford's h hold." Everyone knows about slavery — who cares about p in the reign of Queen Anne? White Pube were pushing open door.

In the case of the Tate's Whistler Room, it's possibl White Pube has simply got it wrong. True, it breathes a m escapism — fairylike, entrancing and playful were adje used at the time — seen in the work of other artists, wh doing their best not to remember the First World War, su Eric Ravilious, who also died in the Second World War. B whimsy is at various points undermined by, for example, a figure of a drowning boy, his arms seen waving above the su of a stream, and a cross marked by the initials D.A.W.: th those of Whistler's elder brother Denny who died in 191 spite his great charm, both as a man and a painter, Whistl not as frivolous as he appears.

From childhood, his sketchbooks were filled with exqu drawn but alarmingly violent images, such as a decap head being impaled on a pole. At the Tate, his nostalgi

r's mural in
aurant of
tain: slave
ail below

stler was an ironist, whose ery should no more be taken at value than that of Grayson Perry. as "one of the most sensitively ired and intelligent of men"

laced with mockery, according to his brother Sir Laurence Whistler, in the spirit of Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* or Edith Sitwell's *Façade*. While the mural was being painted, Britain was in a state of conflict over the General Strike. Unease, even horror, seep into Whistler's arcadia. That is the point of the image of the black child on a string. In juxtaposition to the winsome girl who is leading him, it was doubly shocking.

Whistler was an ironist, whose imagery should no more be taken at face value than that of Grayson Perry. There's a hint of the black humour of Evelyn Waugh – except that whereas Waugh was rude and snobbish, Whistler was adored for his warmth, wit and kindness to children, whom he would entertain with his sketches, being, in the words of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, "one of the most sensitively cultured and intelligent of men".

IF THE RESTAURANT DOES CLOSE, the Tate will be left with a problem on its hands. As one of the fixtures and fittings of a Grade 1 listed building, the mural cannot simply be dismantled or painted over. A room so unequivocally offensive could hardly be given over to gallery space.

The Tate should beware. Wokery is now so pervasive and deeply entrenched that a group of Conservative peers and MPs have formed a Common Sense Group to redress the balance. Launched in a letter to the *Daily Telegraph*, it may seem that they are a collection of Sir Bufton Tuftons, but they appear to have the ear of Number 10.

Just as the National Trust's support for faddish causes has attracted the attention of the Charity Commission, so there are reports that the Cabinet Office is monitoring the social media feeds of museum directors who will soon be up for reappointment. Ultimately government holds the purse strings and when the Tate applies for help to get over the shortfall in income caused by Covid, the closure of the Whistler restaurant may not be forgotten. Baker's Whig Junto arrived because the Treasury agreed to accept it in lieu of inheritance tax. Who knows whether the Tate will be regarded as a fit object of such public generosity in future?

Out with the Old Masters?

Charles Saumarez Smith wonders whether traditional museums will be replaced by modern "experiences"

I SPENT THE EARLY DAYS OF LOCKDOWN writing and rewriting the conclusion to a book on the history of museums since the Second World War (actually, since the opening of New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1939), desperately trying to figure out what the effect of a gigantic pandemic is likely to be.

Will reopened museums continue more or less as they are — confident spaces of great civic grandeur, funded by a combination of the state and private sector? Or will they have to retreat and retrench as public funding takes a battering and as private donors are bruised by the attacks on the sources of their wealth and their motives for giving?

Now, nine months on, and close to the publication of the book, *The Art Museum in Modern Times* (Thames & Hudson) in March, I am not much clearer as to the answer. On the one hand, I see no signs of those museums with ambitious development plans retreating from them or changing what they are planning to do. In Narbonne in the south of France, Norman Foster has been working on a brand-new Musée de la Romanité in Narbonne (MuRéNA), which is due to open in the spring. It is an immense and very ambitious project, all on a single storey, designed to give a feel of walking round a rediscovered Roman villa, with a great wall of stone funerary blocks which were recovered from the city walls during the nineteenth century.

Likewise, in Hong Kong, the authorities are still hoping to be able to open the new, so-called M+ in autumn 2021, in spite of repeated delays and the ousting of the chief executive in charge of delivering the project. It has been designed by Herzog and de Meuron, who have become the museum designers of choice across the globe, and unusually for a museum building is strongly vertical, giving it a dominant visual presence on Hong Kong harbour, presumably as a way of attracting visitors across to West Kowloon Cultural District, which, at least at the moment, is not very easily accessible.

There are equally grand plans for the 2022 opening of what is being called Sydney Modern, currently being built next to the Art Gallery of New South Wales to accommodate both its modern and aboriginal art collections, designed in the Japanese firm SANAA's characteristically lightweigl with big open spaces free of columns and much covered outside.

Charles Saumarez Smith was secretary and chief executive of the Royal Academy of Arts and is now chairman of the Royal Drawing School

Meanwhile, Los Angeles County Museum (LACMA) tc opportunity of Covid to demolish its existing 1960s and buildings, which were regarded as too expensive to ref and make earthquake-proof. They are being replacec grand, single-deck museum designed by the Swiss archit ter Zumthor, which, like many museums nowadays, will r the traditional displays organised according to date, lo and material with more thematic changing exhibitions.

Likewise, the National Portrait Gallery in London clo doors last March and will not reopen until spring 2023, gi an opportunity to reconfigure the hanging and layout of lections from top to bottom, treating the ground floor a circulation space, creating an open, public plaza immedia the north of its building facing up Charing Cross Road, ar ting exhibitions on to the first floor.

ALL OF THESE NEW PROJECTS are statements of unc ished confidence in the future. They are perhaps different way that they display their collections — less obviously di often more thematic, and much more global in scope — b full of confidence and optimism in the continuing impo of museums as a forum for national and civic pride, a stat of public confidence, a way of displaying art and a vehi attracting international tourists.

Ambitious: The new Musée de la Romanité, Narbonne

the risks to museums that I identified at the beginning of ıdemic have not gone away and, if anything, have been ed in the public rhetoric surrounding museums. The first ıst-discussed is the attitude of the big donors who have ınally poured funds into museums on both sides of the :, particularly if, as is happening, they can no longer be ent of a place in their governance. It is possible this will be ed by co-opting new, more diverse museum boards in ɔ make them look and feel different, while the authority ınagement, the way they are chaired and the member- finance and audit committees will remain in the hands ditional, neoliberal, and mostly male financial élite.

it was revealing to read the statement of the chair of the ɔre Museum of Art, following its now "paused" proposal important works from its collection, including a Brice

Dominant: The proposed M+ museum in Hong Kong

, a Clyfford Still which the artist had himself presented ɔllection, and a large silkscreen Andy Warhol of Leonar- t Supper, which was expected to sell for $40 million. The cording to Christopher Bedford, the museum's director, reate an endowment in order to be able to pay staff bet- s is done specifically in recognition of the protest being ıuseum staff to be paid an equitable living wage to per- re work for an institution with a social justice mission."

:hair of the board of trustees, Clair Zamoiski Segal, is- ublic letter in which she wrote that the museum "placed l value on the work of white, male artists and established of access that do not engage, invite, or make welcome :st group of individuals . . . along with many other muse- ɜ] have been operating within a system that has exclud- ıany for far too long".

of her predecessors as chair promptly threatened to ɴ their promised gifts. This is the first round in what may be a big battle between traditional donors and collectors of works of art and those who are interested in fighting for change.

THE SECOND ISSUE MUSEUMS FACE is the increasing number of demands for restitution, part of the attack on the legacy of colonialism. In *The Future of the Museum,* a recent volume of interviews with current museum directors, Tom Campbell, the former director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, now director and CEO of the Fine Arts Museums of Francisco, states:

> "The old hierarchies in which museums in London, Berlin, Paris, New York, held all the greatest treasures have to be surpassed if we truly want to fulfil our mission. Give the Parthenon Marbles back to Athens. Return a significant body of Benin Bronzes. If we are to be respected as enlightened and forward-thinking educational institutions, then we have to shed the mindset of colonialism and exploitation."

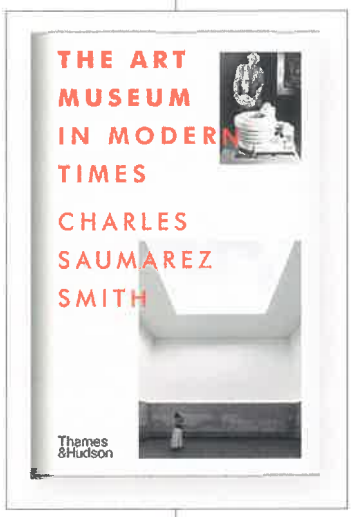
Campbell's argument is that museums were forced to adapt to changing views as to whether to buy and display antiquities with no known provenance. Nobody now argues against the return of art forcibly seized by the Nazis. It is possible that the British Museum, the V&A and the Metropolitan Museum might begin to return works of art which are documented as having been forcibly seized through acts of war and plunder, but there would be a question as to whether or not this could, or should, be restricted to a small number of very high-profile symbolic objects. What Campbell is advocating is a much more wholesale return of works from the major international collections. I don't see any signs of this happening.

THE THIRD AREA in which there has been a loss of faith, or loss of confidence, is in any belief in the continuing authority of the Western canon; though this does not seem in any way to have stopped the public from visiting, admiring and wanting to experience the greatest works of art of the European tradition, from Giotto's frescoes in the Arena Chapel, to Piero della Francesca's Arezzo frescoes, to Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* and *Last Supper*, to Rembrandt's *Nightwatchmen* in the Rijksmuseum. The greatest works of Western European art remain the touchstones of public experience of art. They give a sense of authority to the museums that hold them. so it is going to be a big task if museums truly want to reorient the canon away from the Western tradition.

The interviews published in *The Future of the Museum* help one to understand and interpret what is happening, the problems and challenges that museums now face, although not necessarily in the way that its authors intended. What I found remarkable was the uniformity and consistency of views from the directors of many different types of museum, including the

High Line in New York (not really a museum) and the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI). They are, nearly without exception, hostile to the idea that a museum should be in any way a source of intellectual and artistic authority and are opposed to the belief that museums should be centred round the study and display of works of art, wanting them to be oriented round the needs and demands of visitors instead, although who exactly interprets these demands is never made clear.

Suhanya Raffel, director of M+, in Hong Kong, comes from Australia, where she helped establish the Asia Pacific Triennial at the Queensland Art Gallery. She is, not surprisingly, interested in a reorientation of the canon away from Europe towards Asia: "I firmly believe that the twenty-first century will be Asia-centred. We need to ensure we have substantial public institutions in the region that own and deliver the stories and voices from our part of the world: to talk about our histories, our creative ideas and our contributions, that are influencing global conversations." The purpose of the museum is not to educate, but "a refuge, a place for slowing down, for reflection, for challenge and joy".



Victoria Noorthoorn, director of the Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires, says: "We had to reinvent the museum. Our obsession has been to become a sounding board for ideas developed by Argentine artists at this challenging time, and to provide support to the artistic community, the teachers and families at home, and society at large . . . The museum is a meeting place, a place for education, and a platform for the enjoyment of art and culture."

Franklin Sirmans, director of the Perez Art Museum in Miami (PAMM), describes a museum as "a civic sanctuary for idealism, for free thought, and for providing a space and place for conversation". Marie-Cécile Zinsou of the Fondation Zinsou, a showcase for contemporary African artists in Cotonou, Benin, describes how, "If you're a museum, you shouldn't feel like a cupboard. It shouldn't feel like you're putting the works in a cupboard that you close and only open sometimes, and after a while not at all, because all you want to do is protect them."

Anne Pasternak, director of the Brooklyn Museum, describes how "Historically, museums have said they are repositories for humankind's great art — we care for it, we study it, and we share it to educate people. While those are important things, they are not a mission. Fundamentally, we should aim to be pillars of society: public places where you can come to learn, meet other people, share ideas, debate and even disagree."

YOU BEGIN TO GET THE IDEA. Traditional museums are dead, repositories of old-fashioned Eurocentrism, old objects which need to be dethroned and reinterpreted. New museums are not about objects, but about debate. They are there to foster ideas of civic liberalism, a belief in the future, not a romance of the past. Discussion and debate, a plurality of views, the power of the audience to determine what lessons are learned has re any idea of learning and instruction. These are the new and beliefs which will make museums in the future exciting. "We have upheld sexist, classist, racist, colonia many other unethical and inequitable practices. So it s not be a surprise that we are facing a major shake-up."

So, what is going on? You could argue that the peopl have been selected for their views are unrepresentative museum community as a whole. There may be some tr this. Gabriele Finaldi, director of the National Gallery i don, is not represented, nor Xavier Bray, director of the W Collection. I am not persuaded that all museum director to dethrone the status of their collections and undermi public's view of museums as a source historical study.

There is probably an inevitable ten for museum directors to express in pub civic responsibilities of museums, mor their scholarly ones, knowing which b to press to secure political support and ing. But even so, I am struck by the unif of views expressed by a wide range of um directors of the next generation – believe that museums as we have l them in the past are now dead.

I REALISED ON READING THE that I do not like being lecture hectored in quite such a strider It has made me unexpectedly r gic for an idea of museums as s where the individual can go a plore on their own without being told what to think; spa contemplate works of art which express and demonstrate ferent set of ideas and beliefs from the present. I don't war stantly to be badgered and made to feel guilty that my anc have travelled the world collecting objects in order better derstand and interpret the world. I don't necessarily rega ideas and beliefs of museums in the past as morally repre ble, but, instead, believe that many of them were stimula curiosity and a passionate desire for the understanding o cultures — a spirit not necessarily of plunder, but of awe.

I have been pondering this issue since completing my I think there is a generation of people working in museum may have been trained conventionally as art historians — was the normal route into working in museums, at least a tors — but have discovered, which is indisputably true, t public do not particularly want or relish being lectured works of art and taught their history. They are more stim by contemporary art than the art of the past, used to le about things on mobile devices and not by looking at th the priorities of museums are changing towards a muc didactic and instructional approach, away from th towards the present, away from teaching towards experie

I can see this happening. But is it a good idea? We will s

lague and pestilence

d-19 has reawakened ıedieval superstition bad things happen to ɔeople

ke of Sussex suggests onavirus was rebuke m Mother Nature

O READ THE HEADLINE in the *Telegraph*, evoking images of a bygone age when plagues were sent to punish us and repentance was the surest route ny natural catastrophe. that this intervention reflected any or a return to the Lord our God. He rely quoting his aunt, the some- ıchess of York and many other le celebrities — including the Nations, which dolefully tweeted ıne that "nature is sending us a e with #Covid19. We have pushed nto a corner."

comforting thought that, despite rmity of what is going on, it's really t us and that a sharp act of nce on our part will bring order o this chaos. That such things are our control and actually nothing th us is an idea simultaneously g and offensive — offensive to a race that still presumes the earth sun revolve around it.

for all the new certainties being espoused by our ia-based prince, older faiths ɔretend we haven't been there s.

Bible is replete with plagues times of frogs and some- the more common tial nature — being used by ı tool of both domestic and ɔolicy. Noah's flood, the ion of Sodom and Gomor- plagues of Egypt, and the ıut of the army of the Assyr- are attributed to God. ıce through the ɔf Catholic Europe in ‹ Death or those in the Book of Common Prayer or occasional Anglican days of prayer and fasting during post-Reformation epidemics show how closely we related our behaviour to the appearance of natural disaster.

Rather endearingly, a state prayer of George I attributed the threat of plague to a failure to push the Reformation hard enough in Europe and pledged to make good this lack of zeal should England be spared. England was spared and history records no subsequent expression of zeal on His Late Majesty's part, in this or any other regard.

AND YET FOR ALL the easy comfort that comes from this humancentric cosmology, there is an alternative strand of thinking which runs through scripture and is much more helpful when trying to work out how such horrors afflict us.

Job by Blake

Job is very much the book of our time for this. If you haven't read it, I commend it to you, even if it is not an easy read. It's a story not a history, but it seems probably written as a theological minority report against the simplistic "good things happen to good people; bad things happen to bad people" narrative that runs through the history books of the Bible, and the philosophical wisdom literature.

This is a story about bad things happening to a good person, whose friends take it upon themselves to assure him he must have done something catastrophically wrong to merit the loss of his family, fortune and health.

Finally God appears from a whirlwind and tells him (rather unpastorally) to "gird up thy loins like a man", taking him on a whistle-stop tour of creation. The conclusion that we are uncomfortably left with is that we are far too insignificant for vast events to be conjured up just for us. In short: he's just not that into you.

If the Old Testament leaves us with two schools of thought on this, Jesus is very firmly in the Job line of thinking. Speaking of 18 men who had died when the Tower of Siloam fell on them, he asked, "Think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay."

OVER THE LAST CENTURY most of mainstream Christianity has developed its theological understandings of epidemics away from human self-centredness, so it's been something of a surprise to see secular thought has brought it back from dead.

And another dark trope from the history of humanity's responses to pandemics has been brought back too: the stranger as plague-carrier, most especially a disliked minority as plague-carrier.

We saw it in counties like Cornwall in the early days of lockdown, and we have seen it much more worryingly in Scotland more recently. More worryingly because it has come from the top, from Nicola Sturgeon, who blamed the "reseeding" of the virus from the rest of the UK, and from Ian Blackford launching his 100,000 Twitter followers at some poor — English! — photographer for posting a picture of the Scottish night sky and demanding to know why he was in Scotland.

The man had legitimately moved to Scotland months before but the leader of the SNP in Westminster neither knew this nor cared. (Imagine if that had been a Tory about an Eastern European.)

Despite the last century having seen the collapse of religion across the West, it seems poor Prince Harry is rather proving G.K. Chesterton right that "When men choose not to believe in God, they do not thereafter believe in nothing, they then become capable of believing in anything."

What this pandemic has demonstrated is that "anything" can truly be some of the more ridiculous — and dangerous — tropes of the past. It would be best if they stayed there.

The Reverend Marcus Walker is Rector of St Bartholomew the Great in the City of London

"I have this reccuring dream that I'm being fleeced by a charlatan"

Johnny's Wild Years

Not shame, but more a pulsing regret
That I was so wild and thoughtless,
Careless of others' feelings, feeding my gree
Musk, champagne, drugs and deceptions,
The casual cruelties, the kindnesses ignorec
I was an animal, saurian with smiles.
Yet some used me, for the charm or play,
And they defeated me and that pain may
Have glimmered self-awareness to my trials
No blissful distractions, nor nakedness, rest
The lust befuddled ambient light's confectio
Folding softly into something else, a kind of
Of conquest, to reaffirm an insensate othern
That was half-met but lost in a kind of debt.

— *Johnny Leai*

Purge

My in-breath
panics the lungs,
scrapes short.

Space crawls away
from the rib
cage.

Calm
disappears in one cough —
then a Zen

monk squeaks
Om from
my throat,

but the in-breath runs riot,
rattles the crown, turns
Zapatista

leading the charge,
backed up by a trillion
ragtag cells,

as blood begins to clog
with balaclavas,
militia stomping for liberty.

I bolt.
Taste mucus and iron.
Spit acid and salt.

— *C.P. Nield*

The Construction of the Reader and the Writer

The final word — as dictated to Professor Nicholas Shackel 2020

Derrida is the writer
of the writing Derrida writes.

The readers of Derrida read
the writings of the writer that
Derrida writes to read.

Derrida, as a writer,
derides the readings of the writings
that the readers of the writers
when they read the writers read.

The writer, as a reader,
reads Derrida as a writer
of the writings as reader that
Derrida he has writ.

But the reader of Derrida
reads the writings of Derrida
and derides Derrida's writings
as a load of horse's . . . oh sorry,
aren't I allowed to say that?

"Actually, I don't smoke, the Governme just needs another back of a cigarette packet to mak plans on..."

ld press cutting provided the key to ſiant tale of life after Auschwitz

ſurviving he straits f hell

osie Whitehouse

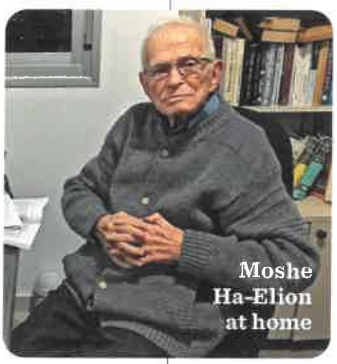
NINETY-FIVE-YEAR-OLD MOSHE HA-ELION proudly ushers me forward to admire the view from his smart fourteenth-floor apartment overlooking the beach in Bat Yam, south of Jaffa. It is late January and the mist is rising over the Mediterranean as if shielding the memories of the Europe he fled in 1946.

e come to hear his reflections not only of Auschwitz but he hard years that followed: the actual process of surviv- a warm summer's night in June 1946, Ha-Elion was one Holocaust survivors on a tiny beach on the Italian Rivi- ey waited patiently to board a secret ship, the Josiah ood that planned to run the Royal Navy blockade of the e coast.

n I stumbled across an old newspaper that reported their voyage, my mind with questions. Where had they come Vhat had they endured? How did they eir way to this obscure little port?

umed I would be able buy a book on , but soon found myself having to write k myself. To answer my questions I had nto a detective. I found a list of the sur- ames, ages and places of birth at the Atlit detention centre, where the Josiah ood's passengers were interned by the British after they in Haifa. But it failed to answer the burning question: re they?

ted on the internet for clues and travelled to Ukraine, ia and Poland to discover why they had decided to aban- don the homes where their families had lived for generations. I began to realise this was not a remote story from the distant past, but one remembered by living people. It is a journey that brought me to Ha-Elion's home. He is one of the last survivors of 42 Greek Jews who sailed on the Josiah Wedgewood and one of the few people alive who remember the vibrant, 54,000-strong community of Jews who once lived in the Greek port city of Thessalonica, where he was born in 1925.



Moshe Ha-Elion at home

hitehouse thor of ple On The ourneys to After the st (Hurst)

HA-ELION IS TINY AND SLIGHTLY STOOPED. He pours the tea and offers me a biscuit before he says proudly, "The Salonika Jews were different and in Auschwitz they were considered exotic and tough. We spoke Ladino, not Yiddish, were Sephardim, and many of the men were strong and had worked as stevedores in the port." They also played a key part in the Sonderkommando uprising in the Auschwitz gas chambers in 1944.

Four months after he was liberated, he began to record dates and notes of what had happened to him but soon abandoned the project as the task of building a new life took over. There was no time for pain and sorrow if you wanted to survive, he says.

He was successful in building a new life, meeting and marrying a fellow Auschwitz survivor, Hanna Waldman, and together sailing to Palestine aboard the Wedgwood. Ha-Elion fought and was wounded in the 1948 Israeli war of independence and it wasn't until the 1980s that he realised he had to try once more to write down what had he had seen and experienced.

His memoir is a slim book with a black cover called *The Straits of Hell:* the title comes from Psalm 116:3 — "The pangs of death compassed me, And the straits of Hell got hold upon me, I found anguish and sorrow." He also began to process his memories by writing poetry.

After Ha-Elion's father, a bookkeeper, died in the Salonika ghetto, his family — his grandparents, mother, sister, uncle and his uncle's wife and baby — believed the Germans were resettling the Jews in Poland. In April 1943, they volunteered to go, as they thought life might be better there. He tells me again and again with a sense of bewilderment that they had no idea what was to happen to them.

Every trick was used to convince them. They were even given receipts in Polish zlotys for reimbursement of money confiscated in Greece. The Polish underground sent information of the Holocaust to London, but the Allies chose not to publicise it. It was a silence that sentenced the Ha-Elion family to death.

Moshe was separated from his mother and sister Nina and sent to work in Auschwitz I as a labourer. "You could not comprehend the place. I was there weeks and I did not know what was going on until one day a schoolfriend, Yona Yaakov, pointed at the smoke and told me my family were dead. I thought he had lost his mind, something had happened to him. I simply could not believe the Germans could do this."

He has an impish smile and senses the absurd in the story that he was saved by a fellow inmate, a Polish classics professor who wanted lessons in modern Greek and shared his food in return. As a political prisoner, the professor received food packages from relatives.

Documents from Auschwitz spread out in front of us on the

coffee table detail how he was condemned to 25 lashes after it was found that he had sent a note to a girl from Salonika in the women's section of the camp in an attempt to find out if his mother and sister were really dead.

In Tel Aviv he saw the man, a fellow Jewish inmate, whose job it had been to carry out the punishment. He says he does not know if he had been let off lightly: this was his only experience of being whipped. He refuses to be judgmental: "You don't know how it was if you were not there," he says. "You cannot understand the unimaginable."

This is the central problem with the story of the Holocaust as it fades into history: it is so unfathomable that it can easily be disbelieved. Since his retirement in 1996, Ha-Elion has become a tireless campaigner against Holocaust denial, and sat on the board of Yad Vashem, the Israeli Holocaust memorial and museum in Jerusalem, for ten years.

Never forget: Moshe Ha-Elion (left) with then Greek prime minister Antonis Samaras (centre) during a memorial ceremony in 2013 at Yad Vashem Holocaust museum, Jerusalem

AS WE TALK, HE GUIDES THE conversation to his liberation at the Ebensee concentration camp in Austria. "I have pictures. Would you like to see them?" he asks, much as he might be offering to show me a collection of prints or stamps.

He walks slowly but steadily to his study at the back of his flat and settles down in front of a giant computer screen that dwarfs him. He has translated, maybe aptly, *The Odyssey* into Ladino, the language of medieval Spain that the Jews took with them when they were driven out in 1492. He taps a picture of survivors sitting on bunks. "That's me! Do you recognise me?" I do not. He chuckles, and then says in his heavily accented English, "I have written a poem for my sister."

Through his large glasses he studies the screen looking for a file. He has set the poem to music. We watch a video of a beautiful young Israeli soldier singing it in Hebrew. He hums along but I am not sure what is being sung. He sings a verse in Ladino and then chuckles again as he remembers that I cannot understand either language.

He clicks on an English translation. There is a pause while he studies it. Then he starts to sing in a shaky frail voice:

The beautiful young maiden, the most beloved daughter
to whom always her parents, all best in life they gave her.
They bought her silken garments, with golden jewels
adorned her,
and shielded her from sadness, from crying even further.

He pauses and then selects a verse further down the page:

One day the evil Nazis, far from her nest they stole her,
together with her parents, they took her to the lager.
They stayed six days in wagons, locked up by day and nigh
in darkness they remained there, without seeing daylight.

He stops and turns to me. "It's called 'The Maiden in t ger.' You know what a 'lager' is?" I nod and he looks surp He is silent and looks as if he is studying the words, worki how to improve them.

Gazing out of the window, he sees the lights of Tel A skyscrapers and beachfront, twinkling in the distance. He that when he and his wife Hanna first arrived here, he buil a lean-to shack behind a laundry where they worked on sky Street.

His unsteady voice takes up the song again:

But when to Birkenau, the camp of death, arrived,
immediately, her fate, at once was then contrived.
They shout to her, they beat her, each hit assaults her frame
the number on her left arm, from now becomes her name.

I think in this part of the poem he is actually writing himself, as his sister did not survive long enough to be tat He has processed the trauma in a different way from the survivors I have met.

SITTING NEXT TO HA-ELION and listening to his fain voice, I can only think what an extraordinary journey his l been. Everyone who was a prisoner in Auschwitz was the struggling to remain human and alive, to fathom what ha pened to them and to continue to be who they were befor

The experiences of the survivors in the camps, fores ghettos were so overpowering when they first told them th til now few of us have asked them what happened next: ho began to survive. Ha-Elion, like the others, is well aware o

Again, he knows exactly what he wants to say and it i cult to ask a question. The story is an important one th been long overlooked — what happened to the surviv

crucial months and years after the liberation, before the ng of the state of Israel. It is central to the story of the Jo- 'edgwood. "After the liberation all I wanted to do was to to Greece, to go home. Our family were Zionists," Ha- ;ays. "But we never thought of going to Palestine to live. ıole world was in Salonika — it was a whole Jewish world f.

becomes more animated as he tells me how he made his Italy. He is no longer mystified by the evil he has stared in e, and as the years slip away, he is once again a dynamic man in charge of his destiny.

: were in lorries moving through the beautiful Austrian yside on our way home to Greece when I suddenly spot- :onvoy of trucks with the Star of David on," he tells me. ıldiers had little signs on their arms that had the same Star id. I realised they were Jews and it was a wonder." He still urprised as he tells the story.

ıen we arrived in Villach near the border with Italy, we the chance to speak to them. They were members of the Brigade, a unit of the British army recruited in Palestine. tudied Hebrew at school, so I was able to talk to them. I em we were going back to Greece. 'What are you doing ıack to Greece?' they asked us, 'You have no family there ere is a civil war going on. If you go back you will be called the army.'

ras at this point I realised I had no home to go back to and no future in Greece, so along with about 40 others, I decided to follow the Jewish Brigade's advice and we were taken by train to a small fishing village in the heel of Italy, called Santa Maria di Bagni. We were the first group to arrive. It was late June 1945. In time thousands of survivors came from all over Europe from Poland, Romania, from all over eastern Europe, and they all wanted to go to Palestine."

IT WAS IN SANTA MARIA DI BAGNI that Ha-Elion met and fell in love with Hanna Waldman, a young Romanian survivor. "At first we spoke with our hands. Then I taught her some Hebrew and she taught me some Yiddish. That was how it began. Soon we adopted her into our group and she became an honorary Greek," he laughs.

In Santa Maria di Bagni the emphasis was on preparing for life in Palestine. They often marched through the town demonstrating against the British policy of restricting immigration, and in April 1946 they went on hunger strike.

"They told us all about Palestine and I got very excited but with time we realised that people who arrived after us had already left," Ha-Elion says. "Most of these people were Poles and they were moved quickly but we Greeks just sat there. They were members of political parties, you see. They were in the right youth movements but we were not involved in any of that, so no one helped us."

As soon as Ha-Elion and the rest of the Greeks realised what was going on they were furious. "We were so angry, we made a real fuss. Some of us went to Bari and met with one of the organisers. We threw tables and chairs until they agreed to take us to Palestine. The group were quickly moved to Rome and told we would be taken to Genoa to be put on the next ship."

It is now dark outside and time for me to leave. "We must never stop talking about the Holocaust," Ha-Elion says, holding my hand as I bid him farewell. "Never." He may be a frail old man but there is a strong determination in his manner. He stands by the door waving in a grandfatherly way, as I call the lift.

On the bus back to Tel Aviv I read the appendix to his memoirs, in which his daughter Rachel writes: "We were born in the State of Israel in the first years of its establishment. During our childhood you were in uniform, we were proud to be the children of an officer in the IDF, the army that protects our country and assures our independence."

She continues: "We knew from pictures that you wore the striped clothes, which we had already imagined as a symbol of submission and of helplessness." The story of the people who sailed on the Josiah Wedgwood is also the story of how the survivor in the striped pyjamas became a suntanned Israeli soldier with a gun.

YDAY LIES WITH THEODORE DALRYMPLE

ading a report on the *Guardian* website of the death of the Argentine ɔtballer Diego Maradona, I was much struck by two phrases: ɔn to cocaine took hold" and "his private life spiralled out of control". ıay of putting it suggested that both his addiction and his private life xistence independent of anything that he himself did: that addiction, ple, was like Parkinson's Disease, an illness that could reasonably be ake hold" of someone. This is the official, but nonetheless false and d, view of addiction, as something that just happens to a person. e, no doubt, there are people so victimised by others that their ves may be said to have spiralled out of control, it seems to me hat Maradona was one of them.

his strange way of putting things? I suspect it is because of the great haunts all modern intellectuals, that of being considered censorious, bout individuals who bring unhappiness on themselves (and often). There is, of course, a certain class of person about whom it is *de* ɔ be censorious, even ultra-censorious, but Maradona, being an idol pulace, and of humble origin, was not a member of that class.

s a tragic figure, a man who did not put the fruits of his natural talent hat brought him much happiness. The tragedy was in the choices he d in their consequences, by comparison with the choices that he ve made. The fact that they *were* his choices is what made his life ıe had contributed nothing to his addiction or to his private life, he more be a tragic figure than is a broken vase or a punctured tyre. : have no sense of the tragic, only of victimhood.

Heaven is the Outer Hebrides — with the electric jolt of a sea trout on the line

A catch that feeds the soul

By Patrick Bishop

MEMORIES ARE PRECIOUS to the fly fisherman, helping sustain him through the half of the year when the rules forbid the catching of trout, sea trout and salmon.

On a January night when the opening of the season still seems depressingly distant I have only to close my eyes to summon up some episode from my fishing past. The memories come back with pyschedelic clarity. I can't remember much about some pretty key life events but though it is nearly 20 years since I first caught a fish with a fly I still recall the jolt of electric intimacy as though it happened this morning.

Each season you add new memories but last year, with the opening of the season delayed by the pandemic, the number of outings was reduced. That made it all the more important to replenish the dream hoard before the shutters came down again.

Recently I've been rounding off the fishing year with an early autumn trip to South Uist in the Outer Hebrides. The island is almost more water than land and the innumerable lochs and lochans are famous for their wild brown trout. They are beautiful fish, often gorgeously spotted with red and yellow — in each loch the palette is different — and run up to three pounds.

As the summer wears on the brownies tail off and by September it is the time of the sea trout which arrive at a few inlets on the west side of the island, then make their way through an interlocking system of lochs and burns to the streams in the hilly centre and east where they will reproduce.

I love South Uist and when I go my ashes will be scattered there. But I hesitated before making it my last fishing trip of the 2020 season. I wanted to go into winter with good memories and the previous two visits, while fun, had not produced great catches. There are fishing types who claim that they achieved a state of zen contentment whereby catching fi become almost immaterial and it is communion with God ation that draws them to the water.

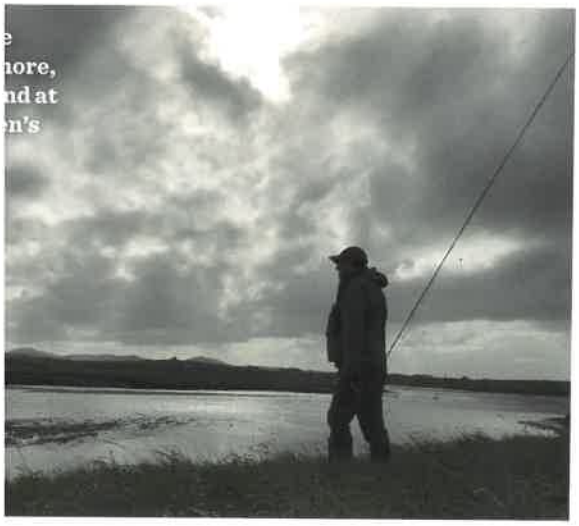
I do not believe them. In my view they are covering for t that they are either a) useless and never catch anything a or b) brilliant and therefore so sated after a lifetime of hauli whoppers that truly, as the great B.B. King sang, *The T Gone*. In the end I booked the flight. To be a fisherman yo to be an optimist. You have to believe that luck can chang that you can make it change.

The technique here is wet fly, with three dangling from monofilament leader at the end of a floating line. A typic may pass with you flogging the water for hour after hour trudging away empty handed. That might to fulfill Einstein's alleged definition of in doing the same thing over and over agai expecting a different result. But the fish tells himself he is not mad. He is convince by constantly changing his fly pattern or l ening his leader he is engaged in a logic cess that will eventually change his fortun what keeps him and the tackle industry g

I ARRIVED IN SOUTH UIST on a Sunda noon, breezy with sunny spells. The bracke a lovely rusty orange. There are hardly an to speak of on the island and no big mou The boggy land is dotted with plain grey b lows that resemble dummy houses p down on an architect's maquette. It's th relation of the Outer Hebrides, less favoured by summer than Harris, Lewis and North Uist. Outsiders either get it don't, and those who do feel a partisan loyalty to the place warm and kindly inhabitants.

My wife's family has a house here dating back to when ther served with the Cameron Highlanders, who recruited bouts. Previously there were four or five in our fishing part

Patrick Bishop is a historian. His latest book, on the 1942 Dieppe Raid, will be published by Penguin later this year



vid-related fears meant there were just the two of us. Giv- determination to score, that was perhaps no bad thing. ıal crew are great company but some are easily dishearted liable if the fish aren't co-operating or the rain gets too o down rods and head for the pub — which was anyway ption this time.

u want a companion who is undaunted by wind and r and ready to stay out till the light goes then Mark is your e is also a naturalist and a professional wild-life camera- ıo picks up dramas going on in the rocks and heather that are invisible to townie eyes.

ıit the water at my favourite spot at 9am on Monday. The re is the only river in South Uist and it is less than a mile flows out of a clutch of three lochs that are the best sea chs on the island. The river is the fishes' route into them ıe obvious place to mount an ambush. But you have to be the right time, that is, when the tide starts to rise.

rout, like Atlantic salmon, are anadromous — meaning rt life in fresh water, then spend part of it at sea before ıg from the salt to spawn. They go out brown and come er and pink-fleshed, the result of gorging on prawns and . They are less streamlined than salmon and deep- d. Both salmon and sea trout come up this little river. If ı bite you know before you see the fish which variety you oked. The salmon take is a long draw. You feel the line ı steadily and you must wait a few seconds before lifting tip — the "strike". Sea trout do the striking for you. They ly like a train, then race off at a speed that leaves spray rom your line. In those first seconds even a pound fish like a serious sea trout only to reveal its true dimensions reaks the surface.

ARK ON A PRIME STRETCH, a cauldron-like pool be- ridge where the peat-stained river meets the tide, while up. I had not finished when I heard a yelp. Mark's rod pectable bend in it and the line was zig-zagging around It wasn't a big fish, a junior sea trout or finnock, but it auty, fresh in on the tide and shining like a silver dollar.

Early success usually means you are in for a good day and so it turned out. I had a small fish on with my first cast and by the end of the day we had caught 14 between us. All were returned except one of about a pound and a half and we had it that evening.

You don't need to do much to a sea-trout, just dot it with butter and herbs, wrap it in tinfoil with a little white wine and stick it in the oven for 20 minutes. To me they taste better than salmon, delicate and slightly nutty, especially when teamed with a £6.99 Co-Op Viognier.

So a perfect start, but we nonetheless went to bed with a sense of foreboding. You rarely get two good days in a row and so it turned out. Next morning it was soon clear there were no fish in the river and we moved quickly on to a loch above. Fishing a river and fishing a loch are two different things. With a river you know where the trout are likely to lie and cast to the spots where your flies will hopefully bob temptingly past their avid gobs.

On a loch you can only guess. Instead of drifting the flies you cast, pull them through the water for a few seconds, then cast again. Hope can soon start to wither as you row up and down the featureless chop, mechanically flicking and retrieving until your forearms throb and and your shoulders burn. The cycle takes about ten seconds. That means in a day you might repeat the process about 2,000 times. If it's going well, you don't notice. If not, you do. That Tuesday it did not go well. Mark caught three modest fish, I none.

There was a certain tension, then, as we set out on a dreich morning for Roag, one of the best-known sea trout lochs. We were taking a ghillie this time, which only increased the pressure. Colin is a shaman steeped in 40 years of professional experience both here and on the great rivers of Scotland and Norway. If he can't guide you to a good fish the gods are against you. You will end the day cold, wet and blackly wondering why you bother.

After a couple of hours that was how it was looking. Colin rowed us back and forth over the likely lies and we cast until our arms ached. Then Mark's line taughtened and our spirits leapt, only to sink again when there was just a wee brownie on the end.

NOW GREAT GREY CURTAINS of rain were sweeping the loch driven by a fierce west wind. It seemed impossible that any fish could see your flies let alone struggle through the waves to take them. I cast mechanically, retrieving as soon as the flies hit the water. Bang! The rod came alive in my hands, electrified by a tremendous vital force that immediately bent it almost double.

I jerked the rod high desperate to keep the line tight and the hook firm and the fish set off, plunging and climbing, racing away in a reel-screaming run then turning instantly back so I had to scrabble to haul in the slack. At last I had it under control and it came to the surface in a shudder of silver muscle. "That's a fish," said Colin and it was.

Mark caught several more in the remaining days. I didn't but I had got what I came for. I froze my three-pound sea trout and took it back to London where it made a fabulous dinner. The memory of eating it will fade soon enough. The memory of catching it never. The process lasted no more than five minutes but I will be reliving the seconds until I die. A dream fish.

Dominic Green says a new documentary captures the spirit of club that made London a global hub for jazz and nurtured generations of musicians

Meet me at Ronnie's

I FIRST WENT TO RONNIE SCOTT'S when I was seven or eight years old. My father Benny had played with Scott and his partner Pete King, and had helped them set up the "Old Place" in Gerrard Street. They were old friends, and the older they got, the more likely my father was to purposefully meander through Soho down to Frith Street when he had finished recording a programme at the BBC.

The club's narrow entrance opened out into a broad cave, not unlike one of those neolithic caverns in the south of France whose walls carry traces of the first human art, only with red lamps on each table instead of wicks and tallow, and the faces of our hearth gods on the wall: Ella, Dizzy, Oscar. My father climbed onto the empty stage and disappeared into the back office. The woman at the table by the door went behind the bar, and I sat at a table in the empty club, drinking a Coke. The walls were vibrating even though there was no music playing. It was like being in the engine room of a ship.

This was not the first time I sat at an empty table in Ronnie's with a Coke. I became a jazz musician like my grandfather and father before me, and like my brother Leo with me. Ronnie's was our clubhouse, the place you could go when everywhere else was closed or full up with office drinkers and tourists. I never had to join, never had to pay, was never turned away even when they were queueing round the block. "You're family," Pete King would say, flicking his square head back towards the red darkness and the wave of music. "Go on."

AFTER A GIG, YOU'RE TOO FULL OF ADRENALIN and music to go home. The musicians started to come in around 11 at night, all buzzing, all chasing the high. Some of them had been playing duos in pubs and restaurants, especially early in the week; even the big names did these "bread and butter" gigs. Others dropped the names of the more coveted spots like "the Six" (the 606 Club) or "the Pizza" (the Pizza Express in Dean Street). Still others came straight off the motorway from gigs out of town. If you left Manchester or Bristol at 11 pm and stepped on it, you could be in Ronnie's for 1.30 am and catch the last set.

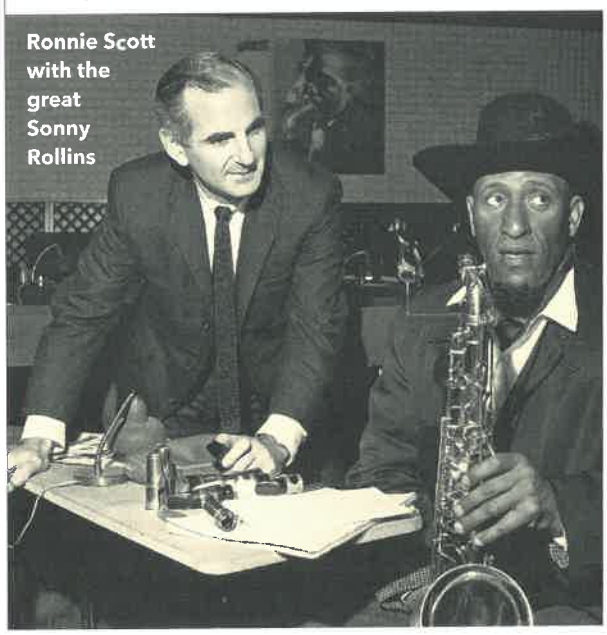
Ronnie's was modelled after the New York clubs of the Fifties. The main act and the support act each played three sets, alternating from 8 pm till 3 am. The first sets were for the tourists and expense-accountants. It was marred somewhat by their scraping of cutlery on plates, and the acts paced themselves accordingly.

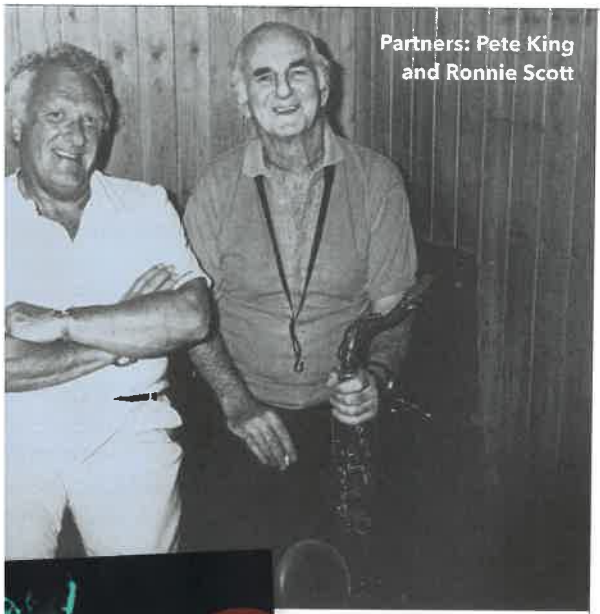
During the second sets, the office workers started to stagger home, apparently oblivious to whichever legend was on the stage, and by the time the Tube was c the place was half-empty. The third se one where the players spread out and p as much for each other as the audience, took place before a half-empty room, audience composed of drunks and cians.

Pete and Ronnie could have change timings and made the star turn play earlier for the bigger c But that would have gone against the spirit of the place. Th up the club because jazz musicians needed a place to pla that is what it remained: a place for musicians that mac necessary concessions to commerce, but no more.

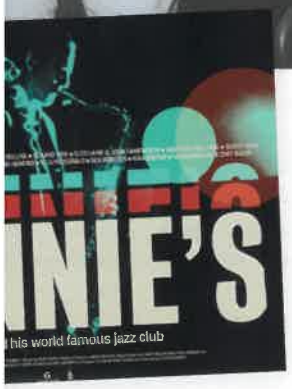
Each time a table emptied, my fellow players and I caug waitress's eye, got the nod and edged forward, table by ta the lip of the stage. Each time we moved, one or two of dered a Coke, and left a tip equivalent to its price. These we unspoken rules: once the club had made its money for the it belonged to the musicians. Night after night, I'd sit inches from Roy Ayers, or George Coleman, or Airto and Flora Pu Jimmy McGriff, or Hugh Masekela, or Horace Silver. Th date I had with the woman who became my wife was at Ro to see Stanley Jordan.

AS SOON AS THE SETS FINISHED, we ducked downstairs who was in. The scene in the downstairs bar turned ove stantly, the faces coming and going, players from the Am


Ronnie Scott with the great Sonny Rollins



Partners: Pete King and Ronnie Scott



acts coming down on a break, jazz musicians paying the rent in pit orchestras, jazz musicians drunk and sober, jazz musicians who hadn't been working and came anyway because they had to do something once the Pavlovian surge of adrenalin n at eight. You met everyone. If they weren't there — this ore mobile phones — you left a message at the bar, and it omehow reach its target that night.

felt ourselves flagging, we'd nip across the road to Bar : a coffee during the break, then wander back in again. In mer, Ronnie's kept its doors open; I remember a glori- k of hot nights when Elvin Jones's drum solos thundered down the street. We went back to Bar Italia when Ron- sed. At four in the morning in those days, only junkies, uals and musicians were around. At five, the first wave r-eyed, waxen casualties came in from the nightclubs. e opened soon after that.

King trundled around like a refrigerator on wheels, im- sunburnt for a man who worked nights. "Allo, son," he aid, then followed with one of two lines: "How's your old r "You been workin'?" Ronnie was shy, and followed the ript as though looking for the quip that would free him conversation. Pete and Ronnie were so much a part of e, so unlikely to be seen anywhere else, that when I nto a dressing room in Scarborough and saw Ronnie sit- e, I asked, "What are you doing here?" "Same as you," he ost laughing.

'S, A DOCUMENTARY BY OLIVER MURRAY, comes s anything could to capturing the thrill of it all, from the shot of Oscar Peterson's left hand pounding out the boogie. I hadn't seen footage of the founding generation, my father among them, for years. They shared that working-class, London Jewish mentality — even Pete, who wasn't Jewish — a romantic love for this music combined with the bloody-minded determination required to learn it and find a stage on which to play it. What Pete and Ronnie achieved is amazing. Not only did they avoid going bust, often with the quiet help of angels like Chris Blackwell of Island Records and Norman Granz of Verve and Pablo, they also pulled in the best musicians in the world.

There is footage here of Count Basie, Dizzy Gillespie, Roland Kirk, Sarah Vaughan, Ella Fitzgerald, Ben Webster, Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins, Buddy Rich, Van Morrison and Chet Baker, and even a bootleg of Jimi Hendrix's last gig. By presenting music of this calibre, night after night, they made London a global hub for jazz. And by letting all the jazz musicians in England in for nothing, or for a ludicrously reduced members' price, they educated several generations of local musicians, which by the mid-Sixties led to the emergence of a distinctively British scene.

Jazz in Britain is a small world, but Ronnie's became part of the big world. When I eventually went to the clubs in New York, I was disappointed. The Village Vanguard felt like a basement scout hall, the Blue Note like a chicken-in-a-basket rip-off. Ronnie's, by staying the same, had become the last of them all. It couldn't last. When Ronnie died in 1997, we knew it was over. Pete kept it going for another decade, but the wheels were coming off. In 2005, he sold it.

THE CLUB SURVIVES, and it's good that it does, and it probably did have to change or die, but the people who run it now — and whose fatuous self-aggrandisement is the only bum note in Murray's excellent documentary — are the sort that Pete would have told, as he frequently did tell people, to piss off. It's not the same place. It can't be, of course: the greats are gone.

I never did become a member of the only club I wanted to be a member of. But then, perhaps I don't need to. A few days before I saw *Ronnie's*, I was flying from London to the States and thought I'd listen to some music. One of the three options was a programme to mark the club's sixtieth birthday. Back it all came to me at 39,000 feet: what a greatly underestimated tenor player Ronnie was; the legends of the impossible Stan Getz and the inspirational Sonny Rollins; anecdotes from Ray Gelato, who I'd had dinner with the night before, and Alex Garnett and James Pearson, the "chaps" I played with night after night and who, as I've digressed further and further into writing, have kept the faith and now run the house band at Ronnie's.

It's been 20 years since I started earning money as a writer, but I still think of myself as a musician. In my mind, I never stopped hearing the music in that empty room, never lost the buzz of walking into the waves of heat, smoke and sound. This is what jazz does to you: it takes you over, makes you a different person, makes you the person you are. If Ronnie's has become an institution, then I suppose I'm institutionalised.

***Ronnie's: Ronnie Scott and his World-Famous Jazz Club*, directed by Oliver Murray, can be seen on BBC iPlayer**

ALL THE THINGS I HAVE NEVER DONE...

***Joseph Connolly** has never ridden a bike, drunk a pint of bitter or had a curry. Can you match his epic non-achievements?*

Joseph Connolly has written 14 novels, most recently *This is 64* (Riverrun)

HAVING RECENTLY NOTCHED UP MY score years and ten, and now that the a ness of 2020 is finally behind us (*O sun lands, where art thou?*) I thought the might be overripe for me to take stock the things I have actually done duri these years on earth. Achievements. Realisation of grand tions — plans fulfilled, activities explored, experiences u gone. Jotting all these down on the back of the proverb packet took no time at all, and although this was followe considerable age to further pummel my brain for fresh rec tion, the list was remaining stubbornly and embarras sparse. Pretty sobering, really.

So I thought a new tack was called for, and — ever resou — I turned my mind instead to everything I have never d all, either through lack of desire, bravery, determination, and even, on occasion, principle. And oh Lord — now in tion was coming thick and fast: I could have filled a book.

So now I know the truth: all those years have been cra with not doing practically everything you can think of. M evidently, is no rich tapestry — the thing is threadbare, let it: a bedraggled hanging that is shot through with hole could even regard this essay as the throwing down of a ga should you be so inclined to pick it up — and here is the lenge: I bet I haven't done more things than you haven't d

SO LET'S TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT THIS: it transpire most of the glaring gaps in my curriculum vitae do not form a series of unrealised whims, but are actually quite core: the sort of stuff that most people have done and co to do quite without thinking, and just all of the time. Like c a car, say. I have never done this — or, at least, not since co ing my brief course of driving lessons in 1967.

Well, I was just 17 (you know what I mean) and obsesse cars almost to the exclusion of all else. All I had ever wan my seventeenth birthday — I had been counting down th — was to learn how to drive, while feeling absolutely cor that I wouldn't actually require any tuition at all, so positi I that I had been put on this earth simply to cruise the Co in a (convertible) Corniche, and even win a Grand Prix or t it came as a poleaxing shock to me when I sat behind the for the very first time, and discovered in an instant that I c at all feel at home: this duck just would not take to water. ing the mirror — no problem at all with that. Everythin though, felt completely alien to me, and gear changing ticular: the clutch and I were never destined to be friends.

During the second lesson, when I think he must alread had the measure of me, my silently despairing instructor su ed we try to reverse, and I just burst out laughing at the ver I knew from appalling experience that it was practically b my powers to make the car go at all, le bloody backwards. Having royally mes the reverse, I gaily executed a 23-point order to show willing, while my subs emergency stop proved to be actually r

ly affair, taking the length of several to eventually accomplish.

driving test — there was a memorable on. The thing is, I never for a minute felt I tually in charge of the car — I was no han a helpless and wide-eyed passenger hicle which was simply rolling away with ide it. At the conclusion, the examiner e solemnly that I had failed, while seem- teful and rather surprised to find that at e was still alive.

hat was that. I have never ridden a bike Not a motorbike, I don't mean (of course it merely the regular kind. As a child, I veted a Triang tricycle (it was the boot e bell that both held special appeal) but d that such a thing was for babies, which faze me in the least: I suffered from no ns of grownupness. It was perfectly ob- o me that just the two narrow wheels ver going to work, and especially with top of them. The list continues: I have owed a boat; just as well, maybe, as I have never swum My non-swimming is probably explained by a deranged at school who threw me into the pool, while fully aware I was capable of was drowning, with no time even for a have never entered the water since.

HEN I HAVE NEVER BEEN remotely intrepid. The fact ople will actually pay (as opposed to demand a consider- e) in order to throw themselves out of an aeroplane, bungee-jump, ascend in a balloon — I just simply cannot it. I have never done any of these things, it goes without and nor have I potholed or climbed a mountain (or to. What? You go up, and then you come down? How is that?)

l the same about skiing, with all the attendant splintered après ski will do me very nicely, thank you. I would never n a helicopter either. Stars, plutocrats and oligarchs do the time, and rather often it is their last act (not) on earth. met a man who had spent his entire professional life ig the things. Do you fly in them often, I asked him — and hed. Never once, he said, I know all the things that can, en do, go wrong.

even non-dangerous sports have always been a no-no for ver played tennis or ping-pong: you hit a ball, he hits it oh please. Golf? God, no; I mean, honestly. At school I a bit of cricket (badly, of course) merely because I rather e clothes. Never rugby, though: mud and pain. I have aught a fish, largely because I could not think of going the process of sitting damply from dawn till dusk, my igling, in order not to catch a fish. Nor, incidentally, have itted a fish. Or, indeed, cooked one.

ally, things I have never cooked could go on for an eter- u might think that I can't boil an egg, but it isn't true — never poached one though, nor ever "whipped up" an omelette. Never made bread, never baked a cake. I have never stalked an animal, nor shot one: the plummet of a bird from the sky is just too awful to behold; although grouse remains one of my very favourite dishes. I've never killed anything, apart from wasps, obviously: wasps just have to die, for they are truly evil. Never killed a person, certainly (wanted to, from time to time) though in this I suspect I find myself firmly with the majority.

And what about technology? Oh dear me. Having never had a fax machine, I resisted having email for as long as I possibly could — that is, right up until the point when telephone messages were never responded to because no one any more was listening to telephone messages, and letters were going unanswered, possibly due to their never being opened, so unexpected was their sudden appearance. Proper letters, I mean, handwritten with a fountain pen on decent stationery.

For a good long while, the most modern innovations for me were envelopes and stamps which no longer required the dispensing of much saliva. So yes, I do email, and I Google, and that's about it. Do you actually need me to tell you that I have never Skyped, tweeted or Instagrammed (being actually unsure what any of those mean) and nor have I Zoomed, pandemic or no. I have no Kindle, because obviously I continue to read books, magazines and newspapers in the time-honoured and traditional way. I have never owned an iPhone or an iPad or an iAnythingElse, and of course have never even so much as thought of taking a selfie.

OTHER EVERYDAY ACCESSORIES I have never owned include a car (self-evidently), a dishwasher, a microwave or a cat. The list of perfectly ordinary things which I have never had truck with is practically endless: a lottery ticket, for instance — never occurred to me to buy one: it could be Me, but it Won't, will it?

Gambling, I have to say, is the one vice that seems to have passed me by. Never done the pools, bet on a horse, played poker (clad or stripped), baccarat, roulette, nor any of the other impossibly glamorous-looking things that 007 gets up to in enviably louche surroundings. And nor that thing that Americans appear to be very given to, rather disconcertingly known as "craps". All this goes a very long way to explaining why I have never won anything, this to include all raffles and tombolas: not even a wooden spoon. Nor have I ever won a competition, though to be fair, I have never entered one.

I **HAVE NEVER SHAVED.** Not really. The few odd little downy hairs that sprouted on my face up to the age of 17 or so I initially allowed to flourish as best they may, but when it became too horribly clear that the five on the left side of my upper lip were just never going to join up with the seven on the other side and put their backs into becoming a gently drooping moustache just like Paul McCartney's on the gatefold of the *Sergeant Pepper* LP, I attacked them with a very malevolent electric razor inherited from an uncle: it leapt about in my hands — the very devil to control it. And oh my God, did it burn — my poor cheeks and neck soon came to resemble just so much pork luncheon meat.

So I simply determined to stop hurting myself in this way, and my face has been obliterated ever since. I did not contemplate giving a "wet shave" a go because it struck me as messy, and I knew that every single morning I would be alive with "nicks" and their attendant squares of lavatory paper: whereas a cutthroat would have done just that.

What else? I would love to be able to say that I have never ventured on to the Underground — I have, of course, though not since 1976: I am told it is no nicer. I have never ironed a shirt. Let me be plain: I have never plugged in an iron. Never changed a nappy. When I was at that stage of my life, you could still call it "woman's work" without being vilified, cancelled and lynched from the nearest tree by the virtuously feministic and baying mob.

In similar vein, I have never knitted nor sewn: not even a button. And although I am a stranger to plumbing and wallpapering, let it not be thought that I am just another of these effete little arty types who could not put a nail in the wall. I have put plenty of nails in walls, not to say rawlplugged screws as well: done a lot of carpentry and room painting. Not at all sure quite how these two endeavours managed to slip beneath the wire: my guard must have been down.

As to things I have never been, one right up there at the forefront is a graduate. More or less at the very last minute, I decided on a whim to forego the opportunity to go up to Oxford — to the dismay and disbelief of many — and instead signed up for what turned out to be the very last apprenticeship in British publishing, this very possibly saying rather more about me than it does for the state of British publishing.

I needed to be away from a scholastic environment, having spent nearly the whole of the groovy Sixties in a boarding school. By the time I returned to it, Swinging London had ceased to oscillate: for me, the whole thing had been no more than a rumour — not unlike women, actually. I don't think I was wholly conv that they could actually exist. I was swiftly disabused of th tion by the sight of Elizabeth Taylor in *Cleopatra*, and *Pl* magazine (it cost 8/6d, though I deemed this a wise investr

But because I was a teenager in the 1960s, everyone sin automatically assumed that here was wall-to-wall psyche Well no. I went to the sort of old-school school where a ch mine was actually expelled because in his study was fo packet of ten Gold Leaf and a tin of Watneys Pale Ale. I smoked pot — never even saw pot being smoked — and that time I have never had any illegal drugs at all. If the n classes really do round off their parties with cocaine all r they are not the parties I am invited to.

AROUND THAT TIME (and seemingly ever since) it was one's ambition to go to India: I wouldn't have gone if you' me. Heat, dust, poverty and — I have always thought — pe unspeakable food. I have never eaten a curry: the smell, th opposite of appetising, is quite enough to repel me. But the loads of things, quite as you might expect, that I have neve en, or else just spat out the first mouthful and avoided ever (which is odd really, as I spent seven years as a restaurant Any sort of offal comes into this category (steak pie, yes — but no kidneys in it, thank you): I make the sole except paté de foie gras (goose, for preference).

English mustard, baked beans, treacle, syrup (golde maple), coconut, ginger, rollmops, gherkins, Twiglets, gr pretzels, goat cheese, digestive biscuits, honey, marm chilli, Weetabix — oh no. Booze? Wine is my thing — largel deaux — and I have never drunk a pint of bitter: just one si more than enough. I've had port and sherry just the onc that was that. Never drunk vodka. Nor, in cosier vein, known the apparent comforts of Bovril, Ovaltine, cocoa o licks. And here's something — I have never smoked ciga largely because I am physically incapable of inhaling: im ate bulging eyes and convulsive hacking. I like Havana

"It's time you addressed your commitment issues, Narcissus!"

h, because those you merely sip.
what other ways would my life appear to be deficient? Tel-
n to me is simply the recording of ancient films on the
g Pictures channel. I have never watched *EastEnders*,
y Come Dancing, *The Great British Bake Off*, *Gogglebox*,
Celebrity Get Me Out of Here, *Big Brother*, *Game of Thrones*,
ire, *Line of Duty* or *The Crown*. And no quiz or game shows
Take Your Pick and *Call My Bluff*.
list of unmissable films that I have missed would be utter-
nal, and certainly includes *Gone With the Wind*, *Doctor*
go and all of the *Harry Potter* and *Star Wars* series. And
gh I love the arias that everyone does, I have never been to
era. At the other end of the scale, I have never attended a
nime, and feel not in the least deprived. Do you really
ask whether I have ever taken myself off to a rock festival,
s Glastonbury? No, you really do not.
here more? Of course there is more. I have never lived
l — or, indeed, outside London. I have never mastered a
l language, but continue to cope as well as I can with the
e. Never had a second home, never had a second wife.
little bits and bobs? I have never been a Best Man,
rted a football team, taken a gap year, been camping, had
age, joined a union or a political party, been on a diet,
a horse, voted Labour, attended a séance, foraged, played
rument, gone jogging, gone dogging, shot a gun (aside
t the funfair), read the *Guardian*, set a bonfire, taken an
sed Airbnb, had a tattoo (or a piercing), lived in a bedsit,
at-share, or even a flat.
ver liked Jane Austen (nor, while we're at it, Milton, Hem-
and Tolkien). I have never danced — properly, I mean:
g the steps and with a partner, as opposed to simply jig-
round inanely. I have never wanted to try vegetarianism
one go vegan) and nor have I ever had the tiniest
ing to be a woman.

O ROUND OFF? I think with a list of everything I have
vorn, and nor would ever wish to: trainers, a T-shirt (and
ly not one emblazoned with a "joke", an advertisement or
ne of a band), a tracksuit, a tie-pin, a Christmas sweater,
, a bowler hat, decorated socks, boxers, white tie, a man-
hell suit (obviously), a hoodie, a fleece, a Barbour, a cap
r flat nor baseball), a tank top, shorts (since prep school),
back, a cummerbund, flip-flops, an anorak, a sweatshirt,
jacket, loafers, Lycra, a padded coat (nor a quilted gilet),
ing ring, reading glasses, a uniform, make-up, anything
g a "designer" logo, nor anything (apart from trousers)
ip.
here we have it: the gaping emptiness of all my life. And
all, I shelter not a single lingering regret for avenues un-
d: looking back on the list, I think that all in all I have had
escape. And how about you? Did you take up the chal-
If so — well I have won, haven't I? You may well have
the thing with a certain gung-ho confidence, but now
have to admit defeat, yes? Own up to it: I haven't done
e things than you haven't done.

TITANIA McGRATH'S WOKE WORLD

Biden's brave new world

Before 2020, the world was a bleak dystopia overrun by Nazis. It never ceased to amaze me how many Nazis I would encounter on a daily basis once I had decided that everyone but me was a Nazi.

Thankfully, 2020 came along and changed everything. This was the year that intersectional identity politics went mainstream, and there is no going back. The gender-neutral genie is out of the bottle, and xe is fabulous.

There were uprisings against systemic injustice, statues of straight white males were torn down, and Ben and Jerry's reminded their customers how racist they all were in order to encourage them to buy more of their New York Super Fudge Chunk ice cream.

This was all made possible because Covid-19 refused to spread during our mass protests, which just goes to show that even pathogens have gone woke.

The world finally accepted that there are more than 400 genders, and that all of these have been persecuted throughout history. Even the ones we invented last week.

Intersectional feminism triumphed over transphobia. All of a sudden, major companies were using phrases such as "menstruators", "vulva owners" and "people with a cervix". All of which is far more respectful to women: or, as I like to call them, bipedal gestation units.

We are now living in a post-BLM world, where Critical Race Theory has been received as the hallowed truth that shall guide us towards salvation. At last, we are amplifying voices of colour that have been historically marginalised. (Except for the ones who don't agree with defunding the police or dismantling capitalism, who are just white-adjacent scumbags that are best ignored.)

Best of all, Joe Biden triumphed over that malevolent incubus Donald Trump. Already Biden has discovered a vaccine for Covid-19, which explains why he spent most of his election campaign in a basement.

As we move into 2021, Biden's brave message resounds throughout our new woke empire. It is time for healing. It is time for hope. Above all, it is time for unity. So let's make a list of everyone who voted the wrong way and deal with them as soon as possible.

Titania can be found @TitaniaMcGrath

Adam Dant on...

RURITANIAN EUROPE
CHAMPIONS OF SECESSION
HØGNI HOYDAL
FAROE ISLANDS
NICOLA STURGEON
WILLIAM WALLACE
HON ALLAN BELL
ELLAN VANNIN
SCOTLAND
N.E. ENGLAND
YORKSHIRE
GEOFFREY BO
JEFF KENT
MERCIA
LEO McKINSTRY
ENGLAND
EIRE
CYMRU
WESSEX
VISCOUNT WEYMOUTH
GUIDO GEZELLE
FLANDERS
SIR ROGER CASEMENT
OWAIN GLYNDŴR
KERNOW
MICHAEL AN GOF
ALBERT MOCKEL
WALLONIA
MORVAN MARCHAL
BRITTANY
DIDIER PATTE
NORMANDY
ALSACE
PROF HATTON JONES
BURGUNDY
S.TYROL
ADRIÁN BARBÓN
ASTURIAS
JURA
MARIA PITA
GALICIA
IÑIGO ARISTA
NAVARRA
OCCITANIA
GUSTAVE ALIROL
ALFREDO GATTA
IÑIGO URKULLU
BASQUE COUNTRY
LOMBARDY
JAVIER de BURGOS
LEON
ARAGON
PROVENCE
CARLES PUIGDEMONT
PASQUALE PAOLI
UMBERTO BOSSI
PADANIA
CATALONIA
CORSICA
JUANA LA LOCA
BALEARIC ISLANDS
GAVINO SALE
ANDALUSIA
FAUSTI BARBERÀ
SARDINIA
VALÈNCIA
RAFFAELE LOMBARDO
SICILY
BLAS INFANTE PÉREZ de VARGAS
RAMON LLULL

Memories of his second cousin, Wittgenstein: Friedrich von Hayek in 1983

PA ARCHIVE/PA IMAGES

who assumed he was a Jew. The Vienna Circle had been brought together by a love of logic and a loathing of kitsch. They were scattered across the globe by the new political religion, as Erich Voegelin called National Socialism, which anathematised their ideas. Though they all somehow escaped the Nazis, flourishing in exile was, for some, like squaring the Circle.

When I was at Oxford and Cambridge in the late 1970s and early '80s, a few survivors and witnesses of this intellectual milieu were still alive. I once gave a small dinner for Friedrich von Hayek, who belonged to another circle, known as the Geist Kreis, during the 1920s. (Unlike Schlick's group, Edmonds tells us, it did not welcome women.) With us, Hayek reminisced about Wittgenstein, his second cousin, whom he encountered in 1918 as a soldier on leave from the Italian front, at about the time when the philosopher was writing his *Tractatus*.

What struck him most about this intense older man, Hayek recalled in a memoir, was the "radical passion for truthfulness", which later "became almost a fashion in that border group between the purely Jewish and the purely Gentile parts of the intelligentsia in which I came so much to move" — and which included the Vienna Circle. Like them, Hayek had also been influenced by Mach; he was among the few readers of the *Tractatus* when it appeared; it made a deep impression. He was less overawed when, many years later, he found himself in Wittgenstein's presence again in Cambridge; this time Hayek thought him slightly mad, especially when he waved a poker around.

Finally, the two met by chance in the sleeping car on the train from Vienna. Wittgenstein recognised him first, exclaiming: "You are Professor Hayek!" Next day they engaged in a philosophical discussion over breakfast, but "just as it was getting really exciting" they arrived at Boulogne and had to board a ferry. There they lost one another. "Whether he regretted having become so deeply engaged, or had discovered that I was just another philistine, I do not know." Wittgenstein already had cancer; they never met again.

I never met but corresponded with per, who advised me to stick to my chos intellectual history rather than switch t phy, which had become too linguist taste. Popper had also had the poker from Wittgenstein, but responded Hayek's aristocratic *politesse,* but with brusque manner. Popper gave as an exa moral rule "not to threaten visiting lectu a poker". Wittgenstein, "in a rage", stor This incident has sparked a whole liter cluding an earlier book by Edmonds (Eidenow), *Wittgenstein's Poker*.

MY MOST SIGNIFICANT, THOUGH IN connection with the Vienna Circle cam attended the weekly graduate seminar A.J. Ayer, by now Wykeham Professor of New College. As a mere undergraduate not even reading philosophy, I was o depth, but I was fascinated by the spectacle of Freddie A self. By now in his late sixties, he would pace up and dc losophising and smoking incessantly, his smooth d punctuated only by the click of his silver cigarette case.

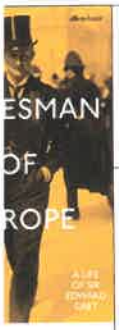
My occasional tentative contributions to discussion piqued his interest, for one day he pointed at me and sa can give us a paper next week. On sense data." Meekly, I having only the vaguest notion of the subject; only la dawn on me what I had got myself into. Thanks to som cramming and some coaching by Ralph Walker, one of t at my college, I was able to cobble an argument together. came and, with fear and trembling, I gave my paper. The moment's excruciating silence, broken finally by the gr "Some interesting points," Ayer remarked. Incredibl passed muster.

The discussion that followed, I now realise, would been out of place at the Vienna Circle. That was wh would have encountered theories of sense data and also heard them subjected to sustained critique. Later gested that I might like to consider abandoning history ing up philosophy. I was flattered, certainly — but, perh cause the offer had been made to my parents rather tha unpersuaded. Despite the rebuff, Freddie remained fri me. His respect, once gained, was unwavering.

Having long since outgrown his youthful role as an ev for the Vienna Circle, he told Bryan Magee on the BBC's *Ideas* that the eclipse of logical positivism was due to the its ideas were "mostly false". Edmonds calls Ayer "mildl tic". He wasn't autistic, he was altruistic.

He might not thank me for saying so, but in moral phil he remained a disciple of Schlick, Neurath and the Circle. In practice, if not in theory, Freddie Ayer too live ethics of kindness.

Daniel Johnson is editor of the online platform *TheArt*



sman
ope:
of Sir
rd Grey
. Otte
Lane, £35

ew
rts is
ıg a
aphy of
George
be
shed
tober

A lighter shade of Grey

Andrew Roberts

THE REPUTATION OF Sir Edward Grey, the Liberal foreign secretary at the time of the outbreak of the Great War, has suffered greatly in recent years. Matthew Parris has called him "a bloody awful foreign secretary", Andrew Adonis thinks him "arguably the most incompetent foreign secretary of all time", Bendor Grosvenor called him "the worst MP in history", on top of which Max Hastings, Niall Ferguson and John Charmley have all castigated him, the last two as the "gravedigger" of the British Empire. If *Blackadder Goes Forth* had covered the diplomatic rather than the military side of the war, Grey would have been presented as an upper class twit who blundered into catastrophe.

"The voices of his detractors, often strident and shrill, drown out all the others," believes Thomas Otte, professor of diplomatic history at the University of East Anglia; and, in a very well written and comprehensive biography, supported by 112 pages of endnotes gleaned from sources from 34 archives worldwide, he proves Grey's detractors wrong, presenting instead a statesman "both progressive and contemporary, a figure of great depth and consequence in his own time and beyond". Otte not only acquits Grey of responsibility for the outbreak of the First World War, but shows how honourably, earnestly and often Grey attempted to stop it from breaking out.

Blackadder would at least have been correct in portraying Grey as irredeemably upper-class. He was the great-great nephew of prime minister the second Earl Grey, of the Great Reform Bill. The avenue at his country seat, Fallodon in Northumberland, was a mile long. His family had lived there since the reign of Edward III. His father, Lieutenant-General George Grey, was equerry to the Prince of Wales. The Greys hailed from what Otte calls "the Whig cousinhood that had ruled over the country", but which Edward Grey recognised had had its day by the time he became an MP in 1885, explaining his lack of ambition to become prime minister.

AFTER WINCHESTER AND BALLIOL, Grey entered the House of Commons aged 23, but he was always happiest at Fallodon, because he was a distinguished ornithologist and keen country sportsman, far happier fly-fishing, deerstalking, and playing tennis than trying to be gregarious in London political circles. He was nonetheless, Otte states, "an accomplished writer of subtle and sensitive prose", including an unpublished autobiography that Otte mines well (many of Grey's private papers were lost in a fire at Fallodon in 1917). "Today, Grey would probably be considered 'authentic'," Otte notes of his wide hinterland outside politics.

He was part of the post-Gladstone New Liberal movement that believed in state intervention for definable public good, democratising local government, votes for women, widening statutory education and constitutional reform, so as to give the newly-empowered working classes a stake in society that would dissuade them from trying to overthrow it. He was, as Otte points out, "motivated by democracy and empire, and by a patriotic sense of public duty".

Promoted by Lord Rosebery, who appreciated his reputation for honesty and directness, Grey rose rapidly and in December 1905 was appointed foreign secretary by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman and continued in that post under Herbert Asquith in what was to turn out to be the last Liberal government.

AS AN ACKNOWLEDGED EXPERT in the vast Foreign Office archive, Otte takes the reader through the complicated international situation that Grey found, where Britain, with its huge empire to protect had perhaps more interest than any other to maintain world peace. Much of the book is taken up with Grey's well-intentioned efforts to steer Britain through the increasingly volatile international system, where Russia was considered Britain's primary antagonist, but the German alliance with Austria-Hungary posed a growing existential threat to France.

Grey: A figure of great depth and consequence

CLASSIC IMAGE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Grey's attitude to France was one of "constructive ambiguity" whereby Britain supported the newly-created Entente Cordiale, but did not a formal military alliance that might embolden France to antagonise the Central Powers. This secured for Grey, Otte argues, "a degree of leverage over French policy that no British foreign secretary had enjoyed since the days of Palmerston in the 1840s".

In the end it was not France or Britain that destabilised Europe but the German "blank cheque" support for the Austro-Hungarian Empire, combined with the fact that German military planning against France required it to violate Belgian neutrality (guaranteed by Britain), which meant German mobilisation guaranteed certain war. "That the Continent did not descend into war earlier", Otte believes, "was largely due to Grey's shrewd and subtle crisis diplomacy."

In 1916, when the senior officials of the Foreign Office congratulated Grey on overtaking Lord Castlereagh as the longest-serving foreign secretary in history (which he still is), Grey perceptively replied, "The war, though unavoidable, will always mar the memory of it." He was of course right, but Otte's compelling retelling of the five-week period between the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, Bosnia, on 28 June and the outbreak of war on 4 August 1914 proves that the war was not Grey's fault but that of the reckless, expansionist, but deliberate policy of Kaiser Wilhelm II's Imperial Germany.

FAR FROM BEING, as Otte characterises the revisionists' portrait of Grey, "a priggish Wykehamist who, through incompetence and obstinacy, made Great Politics more rigid and drove Britain into an unnecessary war", the foreign secretary strained every nerve to save the peace, while staying calm and objective throughout the crisis, as all the many ambassadors he saw attested. Winston Churchill wrote a letter urging Grey not to "fall below the level of events" during the July 1914 crisis, but he never found a moment when he needed to send it, as Grey never did. It was only after the war had broken out and all his hopes of peace were in pieces that Grey suffered what Otte calls "a nervous breakdown of some sort".

Far from the revisionists' priggish portrait, Grey strained every nerve to save the peace while staying calm and objective

Unlike many other diplomats at the time, Grey immediately spotted the possible consequences of what he called at the time "the terrible event at Sarajevo". He did not share the Foreign Office's complacency, and embarked on an intensive round of talks with the ambassadors of all the Great Powers that were sucked into the vortex of confrontation by the combination of Austria-Hungary's desire for vengeance against pro-Bosnian Serbia, Germany's unlimited support

Eve of war: Grey addresses the House of Commons on 3 August 1914

MICHEL & GABRIELLE THERIN-WEISE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

for Austria, and the aggression of a Russia th shows was in precipitous decline in 1905 b equally vertiginous resurgence after 1912.

After trying his hardest to persuade Germ to invade Belgium, Grey warned Prince Ka Lichnowsky, the German ambassador to L that "if war breaks out, it will be the greatest ca phe that the world has ever seen." It was to no a recommending war to the House of Commo August 1914 he stated, "We are going to suffe afraid, terribly in this war, whether we are i whether we stand aside." He recognised that w British intervention, Germany would crush and dominate Europe militarily, taking the in ports of France and Belgium in the process. congratulated by his permanent under-secret his speech, "his sole reaction" was to raise hi above his head and say, "I hate war, I hate war.'

It was at dusk the next day, as the clock ran the hours of Britain's ultimatum to German Grey, watching the gas lamps being lit down o cage Walk below his room in the Foreign Offic the journalist J.A. Spender, "The lamps are goi all over Europe; we shall not see them lit again lifetime." Grey had done everything possible sistent with national honour, to prevent war bre out. Reading Otte's superb account of Grey's s ous, noble, heartfelt, but ultimately doomed for peace in that tragic summer of 1914 mak proud to be British.

GREY DENOUNCED THE RISE of the Nazis his death, aged 71, in September 1933, leading surmise that "had he lived, it is unlikely he have been an appeaser". Joseph Goebbels wa dictably unpleasant in the Nazi press's obituar Grey, but not as vicious as David Lloyd Georg

been in his memoirs, published shortly before Grey's death, in which he wrote that Grey's "reputation is not based on any achievement . . . He was a calamitous foreign secretary before and during the war." He added that Grey's "personality was distinctly one of the elements that contributed to the great catastrophe", as he was "not made for prompt action".

Otte notes that the memoirs "were a potent and unscrupulous attempt to smear Grey", and they worked, although when Grey died, Lloyd George expressed his "grief" at the loss of someone "with whom I worked for so many years in complete harmony". Otte's verdict: "In politics, death brings forth its own kind of cant."

This scholarly, readable and objective book will be the standard biography of Sir Edward Grey for decades to come. It triumphantly gives him his proper desserts as an eminent Edwardian gentleman who did his best to save his country from what he knew would be a catastrophic war, but a war that was impossible to avoid in the face of German aggression. Britain's honour and long-term strategic interests meant that Germany could not be permitted to triumph in 1914. Because of Prof Otte, the lights are going out for anti-Grey revisionism; we shall not see them relit again in our lifetime.

R BURKE

The
ymath
ral History from
Vinci to Susan Sontag

olymath:
tural
ry from
ardo
nci to
n Sontag
ter Burke
Jniversity
£20

Slow death of the know-it-all

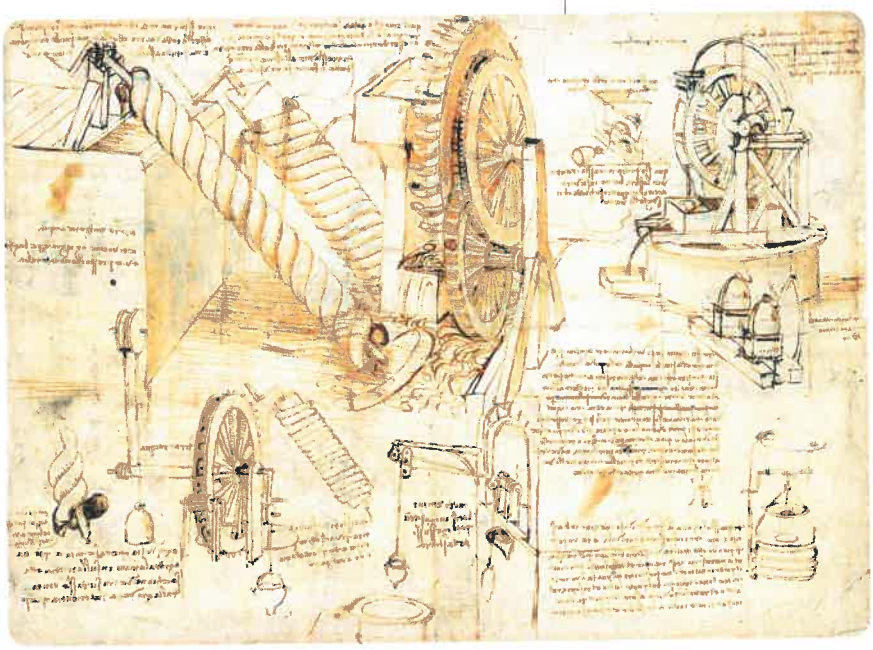
John Maier

POLYMATHY THRIVES ON an eccentric sense of priority, and so it is perhaps not surprising that polymaths are involved in a rather nervous competition to see who can be last to cross the finishing line. That race, as Peter Burke's new book reminds us, has often been prematurely concluded, with the embarrassing result that the freshly-crowned "last polymath", "last renaissance man", or "last man to know everything", must forfeit his insecure title as another late entrant crawls into view.

Still, any claim to truly encyclopaedic knowledge made in the present rightly strikes us as implausible — at the limit, barely intelligible — and that is not to mention the inevitable garishness, the faint air of nostalgic desperation, involved in any claim to being a "renaissance man" (a bit like admitting to taking part in civil war re-enactment theatre). So, perhaps the race is finally over; Burke speculates gloomily in the book's coda that no polymath has been born since the 1950s, or none he can think of at least, as if he hopes to be proven wrong.

In fact, two of the small number of "living" polymaths Burke identifies (George Steiner and Charles Jencks) have died in the interlude between the book's proofing and publication, raising, in perhaps an acuter form than was intended, the question whether the whole species might not be going rapidly extinct.

This is not the hysterical forecast it might appear. As Burke's book amply demonstrates, "polymath" is a category whose content is quite sensitive to prevailing historical and cultural conditions. There is, moreover, no reason to suppose that conditions will al-



The art of learning: Detail from Leonardo da Vinci's *Codex Atlanticus*

PAINTING/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Intellectually energetic: Hans Sloane, Charles Babbage, Joseph Needham and Susan Sontag

ways be such that the category *has any content at all.* In the pre-disciplinary era, little sense could be attached to the idea of "polymathy" because there was no specialisation. Until disciplines can exert some territorial claim in intellectual space, there is no transgressing their borders.

Not until the Renaissance was there a well-articulated ideal of the many-sided individual, the *uomo universale*, in whom thought and action were united: the results of humanistic learning coexisting with a mastery of swordsmanship, dancing, singing, animal husbandry, and an ideal of gentlemanly virtue.

Burke claims there was, in the early modern era, a "golden age" for polymathy, one sustained by a complex and short-lived coincidence of hospitable circumstances. Barriers to entry in the sciences were still fairly inconsiderable, the language of scientific discovery still continuous with that of everyday life; the "republic of letters" connected an international community of scholars in a network of vast correspondence; individuals like Hans Sloane began "collecting the world". Most important of all, the relatively undivided state of intellectual labour imposed by the prevailing level of knowledge enabled lone scholars to make dramatic and often original contributions in disparate fields.

IT IS A FAMILIAR HISTORICAL IRONY, one of a distinctively Hegelian cast, that certain ideals, fully elaborated, exhibit a tendency to undo the conditions of their own existence. Burke quotes Robert Burton's complaint about the "vast *Chaos* and confusion of Bookes" ("we are oppressed with them, our eyes ache with reading, our fingers with turning") and Thomas De Quincy's nightmare vision of the "procession of carts and wagons" continually arriving to unload piles of new books outside his house.

The history of polymathy since the eighteenth century is captured by Burke in stages of managed retreat from an increasingly unattainable ideal. The explosion of information and the fragmentation of academic fields under the pressure of specialisation, gave rise to increasingly modest ideals of general learning — the "man of letters", for instance, who typically confined his study to humanistic learning.

As Burke's treatment turns to the twentieth century, polymathy appears as a perhaps terminally strained ideal. He identifies the "clustered" pol one who contributes to several closely connec ademic fields (thereby compromising on the " and the so-called "passive" polymath, who s but doesn't contribute to, his chosen fields of i (thereby, one suspects, compromising c "-math").

One can't help feeling, as one reads *The Pol* that the book is a kind of obituary — that th math has been squeezed, as a matter of histori cessity, and with his own help, out of existenc haps the most comforting simplification invo C.P. Snow's famous critique, was the diagnos intellectual life was broken into only "two cul The fracture in fact looks much more comple that, and unmendable, with universities appea archipelagos of autonomous disciplines con only by their mutual incomprehension and the bourly relations of suspicion and disdain. In p lar, one is left with the feeling that for the indi lover of general learning there remains no alte in the present age but to become what Fitz rather mockingly characterises as "that most l of all specialists, the 'well-rounded man'".

Still, one feels — and suspects that Burke fe — that, despite the fact that polymathy is not historical option for us now, there is still sometl a more general character to be said about the h impulses expressed in such preternatural fe learning: that a transhistorical human type behind the more historically static conception tellectual achievement.

Occasionally vivid glimpses of the peculia chology of polymaths are revealed in Burke's in tual "prosopography" – his "collective biograp group of five hundred individuals". Pliny the E said to have instructed one group of slaves t aloud to him while he dictated to another; Smith could become so caught up in abstract th that one morning he succeeded in walking 15 before realising he was still wearing his dr gown; Joseph Needham worked even over bre (for which he preferred boiled eggs because he work while they boiled).

Amid the comical attempts at multi-taskin ruthless drive for efficiency, a compulsive, re obsessional disposition emerges — one that ap

John Maier is a writer living in London. In 2019, he was named BBC Student Critic of the Year

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS; INTERFOTO/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

very closely connected with a lucid perception of mortality. On the night he was dying, Pierre Bayle worked till 11pm; "time is running out", was Hugo Grotius's motto. The primordial figure in the polymathic consciousness is perhaps Faust, his hubris expressive of an urge to defeat the limitations on a finite human life, and to control and subdue the world through understanding it; as Marlowe puts it, to secure a more-than-worldly "dominion that ... stretcheth as far as doth the mind of man".

WE RETAIN A FEELING, even today, for the faintly blasphemous quality of the urge to total knowledge, though we are perhaps more likely to be openly disturbed by the ruthless demands such heroic projects of self-education tend to make on innocent others. A polymath, Susan Sontag quipped, "is someone who is interested in everything, and nothing else" (though, one thinks, she might have said "nobody else"). There is surely something to the idea that a devotion to encyclopaedic learning can acquire its own, strangely narrow, monomaniacal quality.

One wishes that Burke had a little more to say about these questions than he offers in his rather predictable generalisations that polymaths are excessively "curious", restlessly "imaginative", and intellectually "energetic". As it is, the breadth of his topic, and his 500-strong cast of subjects, means that Burke's study at times achieves the blankly documentary character of a catalogue. Some faces pass so fleetingly as to be barely glimpsed.

Burke is also quite a devoted list-maker. We learn in one passage that John Herschel studied "magnetism, botany, geology, acoustics, optics and photography", while William Whewell "wrote on mathematics, mechanics, mineralogy, astronomy, philosophy, theology and architecture" and Charles Babbage "on chess, statistics, geology, ciphers, eclipses and lighthouses". This bludgeoning of the reader by lists becomes not only pretty monotonous, but also has the perverse (and surely unintentional) effect of erasing the individuality of the highly individual subjects described. That said, Burke's book helpfully provokes the reader to think about the proper place of a broad education in an age unfriendly to polymathy.

THE BOOK IS DEDICATED to his colleagues at the University of Sussex, where Burke taught for 17 years as part of an interdisciplinary programme which aspired to "redraw the map of learning". The programme closed in 2003, testifying to the mixed record of such attempts to mimic by interdisciplinary co-operation and, (in a more lurid metaphor), "cross-fertilisation", some of the innovations that have been historically typical of polymaths.

If interdisciplinarity turns out to have bankrupt aspirations this may be for one of several reasons, reasons which Burke somewhat elides. At the level of education, it is not immediately clear how much is achieved by the well-intentioned "Great Books" courses, and their like, in their half-hearted attempts to force a dialogue of Plato or collection of modern poetry into the hands of reluctant undergraduates. At any rate, such courses certainly don't make polymaths of their students.

But even more modestly justified, as providing a healthy basis of general learning, the question remains whether such courses aren't a hopelessly late intervention. As Mill reflects, in a characteristically self-effacing passage of his *Autobiography*, the chief insight provided by his extraordinary education is into the "wretched waste of so many precious years" in most students' early education, such that he, "rather below than above par" in "natural gifts", nonetheless entered adulthood with "an advantage of a quarter of a century" in learning over his peers.

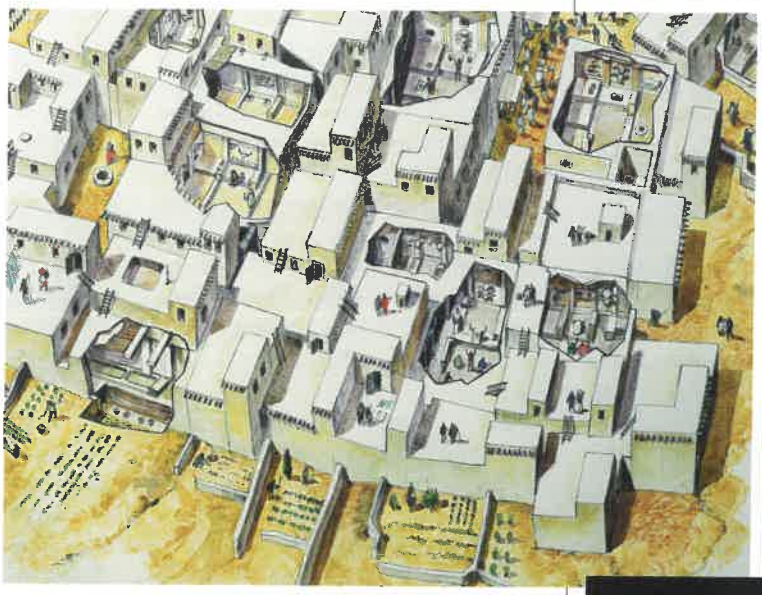
If, at a different level, interdisciplinary methods fail to reinvigorate academic research, this may be for the more interesting reason that the achievements characteristic of individual polymathy cannot be recapitulated on a collective basis — that certain scholarly achievements are necessarily individualistic and resist the division of labour. ©

J'accuse: the legal system in the dock

John Bowers

A TRAINEE BARRISTER IS CALLED A pupil. They shadow a fully-fledged barrister for six months then can get up on their own feet in court and start earning money (not a lot of it at first). Pupils are not paid by the chambers although generous scholarships are often available (unlike in my time). Pupils are often exploited. I had to deliver papers to a QC who lived in faraway Ealing and I used to overhear my pupil master betting more on a single race than I earned in my six months with him.

In the first chambers where I was a pupil, tenants (the permanent members of chambers) had wooden coat-hangers while pupils could only use the metal ones. In the second we had to buy tea and cakes for the tenants' daily teas and yet we were not allowed to drink or eat what we had bought. Now barristers are too busy for the daily tea ritual and even pupils prob-



more striking for that reason. Mind you, if one speaks of "ancient wisdom" in societies where half of all children either died or were killed before the age of ten it takes real delicacy to navigate a path between the Scylla of romanticising the past and the Charybdis of judging it and finding it wanting.

OLIVER, A SCOT, spends about half of *Wisdom of the Ancients* in the British Isles, with a particular focus on Orkney and its standing stones. He does nonetheless range far from home, in so doing providing the best explanation I've read for the claim — uniform across all Australian Aboriginal tribal and clan groups — that they "have always been here". Paleobiology tells us that *homo sapiens* and his ancestors fanned out of Africa in waves: all of us have our ancestry there.

However, there is no migration story in any extant Aboriginal myth, and Aborigines have been in Australia for something like 60,000 years. They also possess rich and detailed narrative accounts of Australia's one-time inland sea and meteorite strikes, things since confirmed by scientists. If there were something to remember, you'd suspect Aborigines would have remembered it.

"It seems to me," Oliver argues, "that journey, out of Africa and onwards, was undertaken before our species woke up to consciousness ... what indigenous Australians call the Dreaming is literally that — a time beyond the reach of memory."

Memory, of course, is a by-product of consciousness, and makes us modern humans. Without it, there's no sense of time, no awareness we are human, no understanding that time passed before each individual in a given community was born, or there is a future in which you and I will play r

Consciousness is what distinguishes *homo* from the smartest mammals, like orcas an panzees. The Dreaming, a sort of time-befo may well be a glimpse of our minds before l became conscious and learnt to remember.

THE VARIED SUBJECTS of *Wisdom of the* mean Oliver's insight often isn't the Hallmark sort, the nice stuff that makes you feel better al world and yourself. Quite a bit is really blood the way Ancient Egypt was a 3,000-year-lon cult, for example, or how the Inca civilisation like all humans — knowledge that there is a fu then set out to forecast it, to control it, to make happen. The Inca method was human sacrific

If *Wisdom of the Ancients* contains a warn in the chapter on Mezo- and South American c tions, when Oliver co discuss the Chimú, t and the Aztecs.

An artist's impression of Çatalhöyük, above, and the Neantherthal skull known as Nandy

Although unfashi these days, it's poss assign grades of mo pitude to colonial po seems to have been better to be conque Romans or British t Spaniards or Ott Nonetheless, what *conquistadores* encou in the Americas we rors even by their ov standards. Oliver concedes that human sacrif civilisational commonplace, but nowhere did pen on such a scale as among the Aztec and In

"We take the future for granted but long ago istence had to occur to someone for the first tin notes, observing how "by making sacrifices no malleable future world might be moulded int sirable, compliant shape." I was put in mind of tent (and failed) attempts by economists and tists and other experts to forecast post-Brexit I or what coronavirus will do next. Oliver's sca "Sacrifice" chapter is a reminder that the only forecast which counts is a real-world test. Fa and experts are just over-educated people middle-class friends agree with them. Perhap the future-forecasting-controlling impulse he i fies is worth resisting. Not only are we bad at it, also fruit from a poisoned tree.

Much of *Wisdom of the Ancients* makes one ciate how we get sidetracked by so much trivia sense, which is part of Oliver's wider point. away the detritus of modernity, he suggests, an *note* of what actually matters.

Oliver's insight often isn't the stuff that makes you feel better about the world. Quite a bit is really bloody grim

ERIK TRINKAUS; DEAGOSTINI/GETTY IMAGES

Mystery of the clicking keyboard

Tibor Fischer

ROBIN HOOD. DICK TURPIN. Long Ben. Bonnie and Clyde. Dillinger. There's something appealing about those individuals who simply say, "Hand it over." And since the days of Daniel Defoe, crime has certainly paid well for writers.

Out of the Ether: The Amazing Story of Ethereum and the $55 Million Heist that Almost Destroyed It All is indeed an amazing story but one that presents some problems for an author. This heist has no balaclavas, no molls, no fast cars, no guns, no abseiling. There's just fingers clicking on a keyboard.

Matthew Leising, a journalist at Bloomberg, has put his back into this task. He has done some old-fashioned sleuthing, and seriously sweated in explaining the intricacies of Ethereum, currently the number two blockchain, poised just behind Bitcoin.

Ethereum is the brainchild of Vitalik Buterin, a Russian-Canadian prodigy who looks as if he was dropped off by a UFO. An early evangelist for Bitcoin, Buterin quickly realised that the blockchain could do much more than merely power a cryptocurrency. It could create a whole decentralised virtual universe, or indeed as it has become, a multiverse. The usual analogy from the faithful is that Bitcoin is like a pocket calculator while Ethereum is a top-of-the-range, Mac desktop computer.

It is remarkable how the whole Crypto venture was midwifed by a tiny group of people. And that they had little interest in making money

The Ethereum protocol and its fuel or "currency", Ether, which launched in 2015, attracted the same utopian and anarchistic dreamers who had got behind Bitcoin in its first days. Claims of justice-spreading and equality-boosts to the unbanked were spouted. Soon, Ethereum attracted entrepreneurs and daredevils who wanted to filthy themselves with lucre. The system almost collapsed under the weight of CryptoKitties, digital breedable "collectibles" featuring different, apparently adorable, images of cartoon cats.

ETHEREUM ALSO ATTRACTED entrepreneurs of the felonious variety. The spine of the book deals with the "theft" in 2016 of some $55 million-worth of ether from the DAO (an autonomous corporation on Ethereum) due to a bug in its code, which almost derailed the whole project. Leising himself gets out on the road in a gonzo attempt to track down and confront the culprit or culprits.

A heist ethos is conjured up by Leising as we hop from location to location: Toronto, Miami, Zurich, Tokyo. Is he being followed? Dark figures lurk in doorways. However, Leising's efforts can't conceal that in terms of the crime and the hunt for the hacker, we are left with lots of clacking keyboards and log-in details.

Out of the Ether serves as a companion piece to Ben Mezrich's *Bitcoin Billionaires*, which recounts the rise of the Winklevoss twins and the early history of Bitcoin. Leising too serves up a portrait of Bitcoin in its infancy as well as a detailed, perhaps too detailed, biography of Buterin, who went to an elite school where he excelled at Ancient Greek as well as maths and computer science.

Through a hagiography of Buterin we get an account of the squabbles and difficulties that went into the births of Bitcoin and Ethereum. It is remarkable how the whole Crypto venture that will probably come to dominate finance was midwifed by a tiny group of people who could barely fill an average-sized restaurant. And that they had little interest in making money.

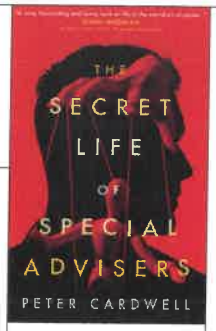
THE HEIST LAID OUT HERE is, in Crypto terms, a history lesson, a discussion of the Peleponnesian war. Things have rapidly moved on. The

Vitalik Buterin: Russian-Canadian prodigy

JOHN PHILLIPS/GETTY IMAGES FOR TECHCRUNCH

It shouldn't happen to a Spad

Roland White



The Secret Life of Special Advisers
By Peter Cardwell
Biteback Publishing, £20

THE PUNISHING HOURS, the backstabbing, the constant manoeuvring for power and influence, and then after two or three years you are marched out of the office, pathetically clutching your possessions in a black bag. As recent events have so amply demonstrated, is there any more soul-destroying occupation than working as a government special adviser?

On the face of it, Peter Cardwell enjoyed a much more glamorous career while he was working in television, both on *Newsnight* and *Good Morning Britain*. But becoming a special adviser was his dream. "I lived an amazing life," he writes, "doing the best job in the world — quite literally helping to run the country."

Getting the job was surprisingly easy. He simply sent his details to a contact, Fiona Hill, who in 2016 was chief of staff to the new prime minister Theresa May. Four days later he was special adviser to James Brokenshire, the Northern Ireland secretary.

Dismissed: Peter Cardwell

The Secret Life Of Special Advisers is his account of what happened next. It almost goes without saying that he found time to write the book after his inevitable dismissal from a later role in the lord chancellor's department. The blow was officially delivered by Lee Cain, then 10 Downing Street's director of communications, who explained: "The prime minister no longer has confidence in your ability to do your job." If Boris Johnson had really lost confidence in such a junior staff member, perhaps we have underestimated his attention to detail. Cain, of course, recently resigned after losing the confidence of the prime minister's girlfriend. What goes around, comes around.

THIS BOOK IS VERY MUCH a personal account. It gives some idea of the routine of the media adviser: trying to persuade Brokenshire to wear rimless spectacles, coping with a mischievous media storm over the number of ovens in Brokenshire's kitchen, and gently explaining to lord chancellor Robert Buckland why venereal disease might be rife in a men's prison.

The tone is occasionally a little starstruck. "I travelled in the home secretary's car with armed police officers, discussing what we would say to Prince Harry and Meghan Markle at a foreign office reception as the police opened a road for us," he gushe point. "I advised the prime minister what interviews about Brexit and the Irish bor discussed the issue with Michel Barnie famous glass table in his Brussels office." Th be people who'd pay good money to avoid di Brexit with Theresa May or Michel Barnier.

There's some lively gossip, though. He d fails to name the minister who demanded th ternoon a month be cleared in her diary so sl visit a Harley Street botox clinic. No such an for Labour chief secretary Liam Byrne, who f left a note for his successor to say: "I am afraid no money." Apparently Byrne also wrote mot al messages to himself on Post-It notes: "G fit", "Buy ski chalet in France", and "Have library (like Reagan)".

MINISTERS HAVE ALWAYS people to carry their bags, them to visit the lavatory be pearing on the *Today* prog and tell them what a wo job they are doing. Cardwel the history of spads back a Gladstone, who appointed hi the civil service.

Lloyd George had a group bleshooting advisers known prime minister's secretariat. C ill took advice from the physic Cherwell, and later appointed him to the c Harold Macmillan had John Wyndham (not thor), who described his unpaid role as "a cla ample of a court jester who lightened the tone

Yet it was not until the 1970s that special a took a more formal role. The government of Wilson, which felt that the civil service of t wasn't entirely sympathetic to Labour, also duced so-called Short Money, named after leader Ted Short, to finance opposition ad (Cardwell, by the way, has mixed views of th service. Some individuals are praised, but he is ing about press office grammar and also notes wonder what some civil servants did all day.")

These days advisers are sometimes better than members of the cabinet, which brings us tably to Dominic Cummings, of whom Card despite being sacked on his orders — is a gre "Many people criticise Dominic for his bulli and bluntness," he writes, "but there is absolu doubt in my mind that he is a strategic genius."

Perhaps so, but a genius should probabl understood that referring to the prime min girlfriend as Princess Nut Nut was never go end well.

Roland White is a freelance journalist and a former Atticus columnist of the *Sunday Times*

CRIMEDICTIONARY.COM

The cacophonous Mr Chips

Patrick Galbraith

WHEN MARIANNE TAYLOR left the Kent coast and went inland to university, she couldn't sleep. Not because, as I'm sure happened to most of us, there was a boy in the room above who stayed up until the early hours listening to French jazz while smoking spliffs out the window, but because for the first time in her life there were no herring gulls squawking in the night sky.

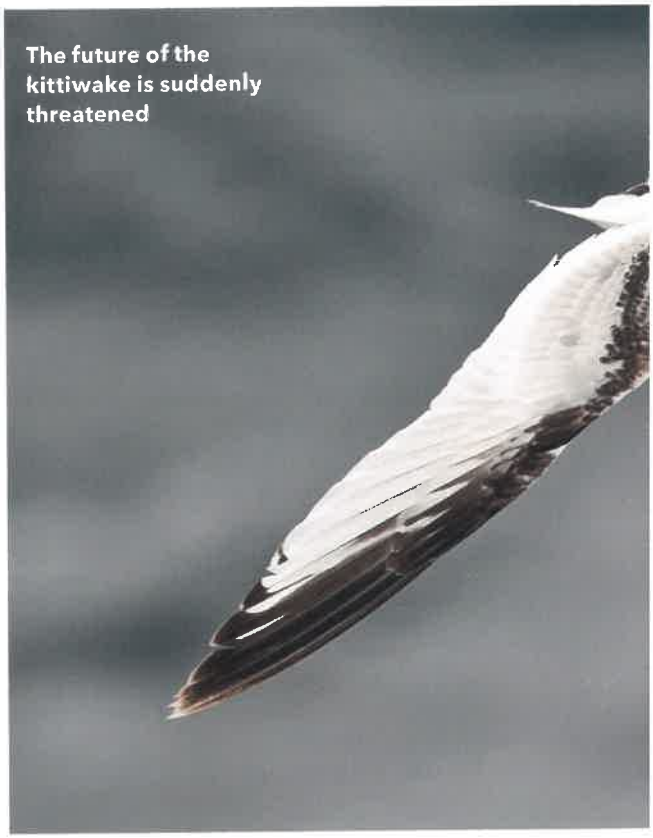
As a nation, we tend not to share Taylor's love for the six species of laridae, from the Greek meaning "ravenous seabird", that breed in the UK. They are, by her reckoning, Britain's most hated birds but they are also, in a sense, some of the most successful. While the population in recent years has declined, Taylor writes that "their numbers grew dramatically through the early twentieth century" due "to the expansion of the fishing industry, and the creation of large, open rubbish tips", both of which provided them with a reliable food source.

Taylor observes that where humans are taking whatever they want from the land and the sea, there are gulls on hand to clean up after us. She doesn't quite make the leap, but there is something of a fear of the uncanny bound up in anecdotes of humans interacting with gulls. They are every bit as hungry, noisy, and opportunistic as we are, and they thrive in so many of the places that we have declared ours.

There is also a subversiveness in their indulgence in carefree brutality in spaces of designated peace and tranquility. The most notable example is the lesser black-backed gull in Hyde Park that earns a grizzly living by drowning pigeons before tearing them to pieces in front of horrified picnickers.

BUT ONE MAN'S HORROR SHOW is another man's meat, and up down the country on any bright Saturday afternoon, wherever you find large flocks of gulls you'll also find larophiles, or gullards as they're unkindly known, flocking to see them. Particularly popular in Britain, larophilia consists of loitering around landfill sites or on harbour walls, with a telescope. Taylor has learnt that the fanatics aren't looking for beauty. Gulls, she admits, "aren't really that inherently appealing"; what the larophiles desire is a story or a wayward traveller.

Any gull with a big numbered leg ring has been registered, meaning its voyages over land and sea can be traced, while the likes of a Kumlien's Gull, which should really be across the Atlantic with the rest of its kind, would afford a gullard serious bragging rights if they saw it eating a kebab in Carlisle. Taylor edges towards something fascinating but she leaves the stone unturned. Why do people, men mostly, spend all night sleeping in their cars in the hope of seeing a "freak" at first light? What is it that they really see in the winged oddities?



The future of the kittiwake is suddenly threatened

Like *The Way of the Hare*, Taylor's 2017 study of what is possibly Britain's favourite mammal, *The Gull Next Door* is ecologically rigorous. Those who want to know about moulting processes and how you age a bird in gull years will be satisfied. However, those hungry for poetic renderings of men weeping in caves and journalists in dungarees who kick cocaine and take on an allotment — all so hot in nature writing right now — may feel underfed.

To give Taylor her due, it takes moxie, when purple prose is the order of the day, to write so functionally. In a sense, it's refreshing, but there is a point to the wonder and projection the likes of Adam Nicolson found such success with in his 2017 book, *The Seabird's Cry*. The point is that it gets people to fight for the natural world.

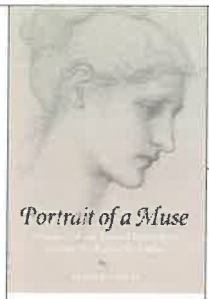
Bob Dylan, as the folk singer and campaigner Sam Lee said to me recently, didn't unite people in the fight for civil rights with numbers and data — he did it with beauty, music and artistry.

PATRICK KEIRSEBILCK/ARTERRA/UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP VIA GETTY IMAGES

SEABIRDS CERTAINLY AREN'T EATING CHIPS in the last-chance saloon yet. They're doing better than farmland birds, and much better than waders, but success is relative in an age when the turtledove and the curlew may well become extinct in Britain in our lifetime. Most gulls around our coast are amber-listed, meaning that the population is in decline but the situation isn't woeful.

But for the kittiwake, at 380,000 pairs the most numerous of our breeding gulls, things have taken a turn for the worse: the little bird, which spends most of its life at sea, is starting to disappear at an astonishing rate. Colonies across the world are failing entirely, the species is designated as vulnerable globally, and is red-listed in the UK. Their decline, driven by crashing plankton populations and the overfishing of sand eels, which form a large part of their diet, is an important reminder that just because something is ubiquitous one moment, it doesn't mean that humans can't destroy everything it depends on very quickly.

Ornithological rigour has its place but — and I write this as someone who recently drove for five hours to see the world's most inland kittiwake population — Taylor fails to rouse passion about the bird's plight at a time when passion is vital. As a field guide, Taylor's book works well. It will certainly leave you much better-acquainted with the gull next door, but I'd be surprised if you fell in love — and she needs you more than ever.



Portrait of a Muse: Frances Graham, Edward Burne-Jones and the Pre-Raphaelite Dream
by Andrew Gailey
Wilmington Square Books
£25

High priestess o a new morality

Guy Walters

IF ANY PERIOD OF BRITISH HISTO qualify as an illustration of Carlyle's gre theory, then it is surely the nineteenth c It was a time when individual men did c strably great things, such as invent world-ing machines, fight wars and even win them, c eases and make scientific discoveries, engage i reform, and generate exciting new movement arts. And of course, despite a female monarch throne for much of the period, it was largely a men and not women, and moreover men wit big beards and great big hats and tailcoats. If th ever been a little woman theory of history, t nineteenth century might not be the first exam springs to mind.

Although he certainly does not claim to e such a theory, Andrew Gailey does come close magisterial and engaging biography of Franc ham — muse, saloniste, chatelaine, confidan observer of British high society for 70 years fr late teens to her death in 1940. Eschewing the yet another biography of a Great Man — to blinded, as he says, "by the lights that cut th from the audience beyond" — Gailey instea sents the life of a woman who was those "who under lit their age rathe commandeer the limelight", and whom "one can often learn much about society and human nature".

The stifling mores of Victorian and Edwardian high society were often challenged by its better and more imaginative brains

And we learn a lot about both. Fo the book is subtitled "Frances Graha ward Burne-Jones and the Pre-Rap Dream", this is far more than a book an artist's muse. Graham's circle included cians, scientists, poets, aesthetes and aristocra she was the leading light of a social circle called itself "The Souls".

IT WAS GRAHAM HERSELF who co-author group's somewhat tongue-in-cheek manifest *New Morality*. Despite the ironic tone, the ma had plenty of what we must today call "progre elements, including — egad! — an insistenc women should not withdraw after dinner whil remained with the port, and that women's op were to be as valued as those of the less fair sex

Evenings were to be more celebrations of wi er than pompous displays of wisdom, and

Valters is
thor,
ian and
alist

Frances Graham holding cymbals at the bottom of Burne-Jones's *The Golden Stairs*

were to be played that were "openly funny and intellectually competitive". More racy still, within the circle at least, women were permitted to visit men who were not their husbands.

A long way from free love it may have been, but what Gailey's detailed portrait of Graham reveals is that the stifling mores of Victorian and Edwardian high society were often challenged by its better and more imaginative brains. Conversational topics such as "the morality of infidelity, the intellectual disadvantages of monogamy, [and] the existence of the soul" were perhaps somewhat outré for most nineteenth-century dining tables.

Graham was perfectly suited to being the "High Priestess" of such a group, partly because like all those of many parts she could not easily be put into a convenient social box. This meant she could be more things to more men — and women. Yes, she came from great wealth, but she was not an aristocrat: the source of her father's riches lay in trade rather than in land. She may have possessed the glamour of being the muse of one of the leading artists of the day — Burne-Jones — but she was not, as Gailey declares, "in the classic sense a Pre-Raphaelite 'stunner'". And while she was also a vivacious hostess, she was also a mother of four who would outlive both her sons.

GAILEY HAS CLEARLY BEEN GRANTED access to most, if not all, of the family papers that are held at the Manor House at Mells, Somerset, the secondary seat of Graham's husband, Jack Horner. As a result, we are able to witness the almost bewildering interplay between Graham and the men who loved her with varying degrees of success. At times *Portrait of a Muse* feels like a Julian Fellowes soap opera in which we see this woman of extraordinary vivacity and charm making great men go weak at the knees.

A letter from no less a figure than Asquith in 1892 is a case in point, and also provides much mirth for those who revel in Victorian sexual metaphor: "Do you remember a midnight walk we once had together through the streets of London? In the days when you were very stand-offish ... How haughty you were! And unresponsive — moving yourself in your well found port (with which you were so well contented) and refusing to budge an inch when I timidly suggested that you might — at least on a voyage of experimental discovery — 'put out to sea' ..."

What we also see is the small-minded pettiness of the supposedly great. One of the most telling episodes in the book is when Lord and Lady Lyttelton return a ring which had been given to their late daughter, May, by Rutherford Graham, Frances Graham's late brother. The Lytteltons had always regarded the Grahams as somewhat parvenu, and had successfully scuppered Rutherford's desire to marry May. Returning such a token of affection highlights how the Grahams were never quite accepted by some.

It would be too easy to suppose that the inclusion of such intimate moments and private correspondence serves only to titillate, but to suppress it would have impoverished the portrait. The whole point of biography is to present a figure as completely as possible. After all, like the rest of us, great men and great women — and after Gailey's book, we should regard Graham certainly as one of those — have hearts as well as minds.

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS/CC3

Evolution of a master

Jessica Douglas-Home

Anthony Whishaw: Works on Paper
By Richard Davey
Beam Editions £28

THE PUBLICATION OF a second book on Anthony Whishaw within four years is both a delight and an important event. In *Works On Paper* Richard Davey uses his interviews with the artist to create a poetic and graceful narrative, complemented by good illustrations. The excellent colour and layout reveal Beam Editions to be one of the best publishing houses in England.

The book's focus is not on Whishaw's large canvas oil paintings, but on the evolution of his technique in draughtsmanship, of his themes, and of his working practice on paper, in ink, wash and watercolour. We learn that in his youth he had a serious head injury similar to that of Augustus John. For them both, the result seems to have stimulated and accelerated artistic growth.

Davey also elicits from Whishaw details of his early art school training and of his time as a teacher. I had the good fortune to be one of his students in the life drawing class at Chelsea School of Art, and to study there before the cata effect of the Coldstre port (1960) on Brit schools permeated thi as it did others.

The curriculum s cluded drawing, as it centuries: learning t was considered the foundation stone of eve that was to follow. It was the central skill, the tool which any potential artist, in any medium master. Architecture, too, demanded it. It gav the confidence and freedom to choose the pa eventually wished to follow.

WHISHAW TAUGHT US TO MAKE three dr from the life model, each from a different vie The fourth drawing would be a synthesis of w had memorised. For him this was a means o ing life and movement to the static space of th ing. He introduced us to Eadweard Muybridge

Jessica Douglas-Home is the author of William Simmonds: The Silent Heart of the Arts and Crafts Movement (Unicorn)

Anthon Whisha Huge ra

BEAM EDITIONS

tographs and showed us how they capture human and animal movement.

We saw no conflict between Whishaw's demanding tuition and that of the meticulous Euan Uglow, both of whom stand out as two of the most important British figurative artists of the late twentieth century. Uglow died at the age of 68; Whishaw is still working in his ninetieth year.

Not always in chronological sequence, the book covers the evolution of Whishaw's art in a huge range of drawings. Early on in his life, he became absorbed in religious images: a nine-foot *Crucifixion* drawing, an etching of *The Last Supper*, images of old age and death, and portrait heads of old men. Every line in his drawings reveals deep emotion and psychological insight.

Early on in his life, he became absorbed in religious images. Every line in his drawings reveals deep emotional and psychological insights

Quite soon, he sheds the hatching and shading of his art-school days, and starts to explore new territory, in ink, watercolour, pastels and crayons. He masters acrylic and collage, ash and metal, and sprays sand onto the paper. In what he calls mixed-media, once-solid figures become blurred and more liquid, individuals merge into groups and become more abstract, and the lines turn quicksilver, volatile and subtle. He becomes gripped by their limitless potential.

AS WELL AS THIS INTENSE AND SERIOUS work, Whishaw produces what he called "maverick paintings" on paper — wry, witty, and with written quips, they are gently mocking but not cruel. Then there are landscapes, more abstract than traditional, painted from memory. In Spanish scenes, dreamlike half-conventional images with hints of sea and sky float across the paint-spattered paper, and dappled patches of light and shadow shimmer and dance in the air. In his English landscapes, Whishaw's movement of lines is a synthesis of fields and fences, flowers and stars.

He painted his delicate-coloured *Small Flower Piece*, all reds, blacks, oranges and pale blue-greys, after walking through forests and dense English woodland. Later paintings capture the flight of birds: a mass of angled lines gives a sense of rushing energy and the beating of wings.

Even if this book is but a fraction of Whishaw's work on paper, Davey's selection has given us a deeper understanding of the value and practice of drawing. He is still working in the same mews house in a Kensington cul-de-sac which he discovered in 1949. An art teacher had set up an "animal studio" where artists could come and draw live dogs and horses. If you were to risk interrupting Whishaw at work today, you will find that heavy beams and iron rings for tethering horses are still there.

Peculiar world of a singular talent

Christopher Bray

PATRICIA HIGHSMITH WROTE such vertiginously novels one isn't much surprised to be told that she ate beef straight from the butcher's block. Nor is one all that startled to learn that having battered a rat to death in her garden, she tossed it through the window of her guests' bedroom.

But even the most seasoned of her readers — the reader who has, say, made it through that passage in *Edith's Diary* about a teenager masturbating into a sock, or who has empathised (perhaps even sympathised) as Tom Ripley batters a putative friend to death — will probably be astonished to learn that Highsmith kept a rout of snails in her handbag. And they'll surely be dumbfounded by the fact that when she moved to France, Highsmith smuggled the snails through customs in her bra. As Julian Symons once said, "Highsmith is an acquired taste, which means a taste that some people never acquire."

I acquired it years ago, which doesn't mean I didn't gasp as I read *Devils, Lusts and Strange Desires*. Richard Bradford's biography of Highsmith is never more than workmanlike, but the sheer strangeness of its subject renders the book unputdownable. Highsmith turns out to be even barmier than her dust-jacket photos suggest. At a Suffolk literary bash, a psychiatrist spied Highsmith alone in the hotel lobby. He told the other guests he'd only ever seen facial expressions like hers in the funny farm.

A breakfast-to-bedtime booze-hound, Highsmith once thought to amuse her dinner guests by putting her cat in a sack and swinging it around her head. She wanted, she said, to see how it would cope if it were drunk. Not that she hated animals. Highsmith always said that if she came across a starving child and a starving cat it'd be the puss that got fed first.

She had no time for people. The vast majority of them, she told her father, were "morons [whose] babies should be killed early". Throughout her life she bad-mouthed Latinos, Arabs, Koreans, Indians, Red Indians, Mexicans, and blacks with their "animal-like breeding habits".

But it was Jewish people who really got Highsmith's goat. As a teenager she thrilled to *Mein Kampf*, and she would always say that the problem with the Final Solution was that it hadn't been final enough. Far fewer Jews, she was fond of declaring, had perished under the Nazis than charity-grubbing myth would have it.

may provide a "complex, psychologically rich act of communication", it is not necessarily a positive one.

THE GENDER POLITICS ARE ALSO deeply troubling. In her story, the influential feminist writer Roxane Gay writes about a man who takes pleasure in slapping his wife, strangling her with a belt, and scarring her back with a razor blade. By the end of the story — surprise, surprise — we discover that the man is in fact trans, which supposedly transforms the nature of the couple's abusive sex.

It remains a simulation of domestic violence, but with a rejigging of the genitals involved, and this — we are asked to believe — makes all the difference. Nevertheless, it is hard to wipe away the image of a man choking his wife with a belt, and dismaying to read a feminist like Gay fantasising about su nario.

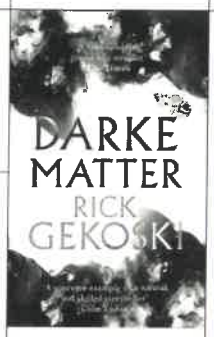
The authors' biographies include details range of pronouns and identities, suggesting is a group of people keen on challenging norms. It's curious, then, that these stories sessed with such monstrously exaggerated femininity and masculinity, orientated around power, cruelty and self-hatred.

And the result is not even sexy. By laying c plicit detail the nature of the BDSM experie sense of mystery is stripped away, and wl turns out to not be seductive at all, but actual sad. Without meaning to, this anthology confirming some of the least flattering ste about kinky sex and kinky people.

Louise Perry's next book is a critical look at the consequences of the sexual revolution

Gulliver's travails

David Womersley



Darke Matter
By Rick Gekoski
Constable
£16.99

Rick Gekoski: S

CAN EXORBITANT LOVE TURN YOU into a misanthropist? Perhaps it can, if the underlying character is right. Henry Darke, retired public school teacher, widower, former cuckold, and possibly worse, is a case in point. Darke's novelist wife, Suzy, has recently died from a painful kind of cancer.

At the end, distressed by her suffering and desperate to ease her imminent death, Darke laces a cup of tea with a mixture of the drugs he has been prescribed for a heart condition. As he hoped, Suzy does not wake up from this final sleep, and Darke assumes that it was his amateur pharmacology that did the trick. He explains what he has done to his daughter Lucy and his son-in-law Sam, who runs a modish psychotherapy group. At one of his therapy sessions Sam describes (not entirely undeliberately, as we later learn) what his father-in-law has done in an insufficiently anonymised way in front of a group of patients, one of whom is a devout Roman Catholic married to a policeman.

Darke finds himself being investigated and eventually tried for the murder of his wife, and the novel ends with the foreman of the jury about to give their verdict. (This playful obscuring of the novel's conclusion has been prepared for earlier, when Darke makes some testy comments about John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, and its final suspension between three alternative endings.)

An important context for the novel, then, is our current anxiety about the ethics of assisted dying. The arguments pro and con are given what s me, as at present a non-combatant on this issu hearing. But what enriches this novel beyond t dictable is the skilled way Gekoski entwines h tagonist's nightmarish experience of being ho and vilified, for what in the circumstances seen as an act of mercy, around the career an ings of Jonathan Swift.

SWIFT HAD BEEN ONE OF Darke's favour thors in his schoolteaching days, and he amu young grandson by writing a continuation of *er's Travels*, describing Lemuel Gulliver's exp es once he has returned to Rotherhithe from th of the rational horses, the Houyhnhnms, an helot-like underclass, the bestial Yahoos. I continuation picks up from the final chap

COLIN MCPHERSON/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES

Swift's text, in which Gulliver prefers to live in the stable with his horses rather than endure the company of his wife and children, who now fill him with "Hatred, Disgust and Contempt":

> For, although since my unfortunate Exile from the Houyhnhnm Country, I had compelled myself to tolerate the sight of Yahoos . . . when I began to consider, that by copulating with one of the Yahoo-Species, I had become a Parent of more; it struck me with the utmost Shame, Confusion and Horror.

Henry Darke's emotional angularity, which might at first glance look Swiftian, is in fact curdled Romanticism

In Darke's continuation of Swift's wonderful satire, Gulliver makes the disastrous decision to proselytise amongst his countrymen in favour of the values and customs of his beloved Houyhnhnms. He is mocked as a "Horse-man" by the mob, prosecuted for the heretical nature of his beliefs, and eventually imprisoned in Newgate. Imprisonment, however, really does reform Darke's Gulliver, in a way that Swift's satire gives us no good reason to expect. Darke's Gulliver comes to see that human beings are not identical to the Yahoos:

> For our species, imperfect as it may be, is not entirely that of the Yahoos, who are merely a degraded version of it, and not to be mistaken for that much preferable species, mankind. For men, however venial and disappointing, are touched by grace, and made in the image of a divine spirit, and — for my dear and fragrant Mary constantly reiterates and exemplifies this — have a spirit informed by love.

The resonance between Swift's book and the experience of Darke is one of both parallelism and inversion. Parallelism, because Darke too experiences persecution by the mob. Following the advice of friends, he decides that his best chance of being acquitted for what he did as his wife lay dying is to make himself the focus of a cause. He and his friends stir up popular awareness of his case, and, in a twenty-first century version of Gulliver's experience, Darke and his family are trolled online, vilified in public, and threatened with violence.

Gulliver meets the Houyhnhnms

CHRONICLE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

But there is also inversion. The slogan Darke chooses for his crusade is "Do You Love Your Dog More Than Your Wife?", provocatively contrasting the ease of arranging for a pet to be helped out of life once existence has become unendurable with the enormous and intimidating hurdles society places in the path of anyone who wishes to show a similar care for a person they love.

Darke's point is that to show greater practical consideration to animals than to humans is an inversion of true values. Yet that is precisely the position of Gulliver once he has returned from the land of the Houyhnhyms. As his residence in the stable shows, he comes to value animals above his fellow men, whom (in contrast to the later attitudes Darke creates for him) he sees as perfect Yahoos.

It is significant that Gulliver does not seem to turn a hair when he is informed that the Houyhnhnms are debating a genocidal extermination of the Yahoos, and in fact suggests a refinement of the policy, namely that the male Yahoos should simply be castrated.

GEKOSKI'S PASTICHE OF SWIFTIAN STYLE is passable, with only a few lapses into anachronistic turns of phrase. But the prose here is just a carapace, because Swift and Darke, for all his superficially Swiftian curmudgeonliness, inhabit different moral universes. Swift lived long enough to see the beginnings of sentimental ethics in the writings of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, but his own ethics were of a very different stripe, as his explanation of the purpose of a sermon — to tell the people their duty, and to convince them that it is so — makes clear.

Henry Darke may repudiate Romanticism (he walks out of a poetry reading party where the chosen poem is "Ode to a Nightingale"), but nevertheless he is inescapably Romanticism's child — saturated with sentiment, and by no means immune to self-pity. His emotional angularity, which might at first glance look Swiftian, is in fact curdled Romanticism, and that is something very different from the toughness present even in Swift's acts of apparent kindness.

A Modest Proposal is not at all points so far from Swift's innermost thoughts about the Irish as well-intentioned critics sometimes say it is. After all, Swift also wrote and published a completely unironic pamphlet proposing that beggars should be badged.

My tedious but meticulous friend, Dr Dryasdust, informs me of a few errors and slips. *Gulliver's Travels* is divided into "Parts", not "Books". T. S. Eliot was born and raised in St Louis, not Kansas City. The Nazi salute was "Sieg Heil!", not "Seig Heil!". I put it mildly to the good Doctor that these details may have been subtle strokes in Gekoski's characterisation of Henry Darke as an unreliable narrator, but he would have none of it.

Six ways to make things better

Bringing back the Net Book Agreement would be a good start for badly-paid authors

THE SECRET AUTHOR has been accused of — that dreadful modern word — "negativity". He has, even more distressingly, been accused of cynicism. He has been accused of living in the last century. He has been accused of being a middle-aged, middle-class and possibly hetero-normative white man. The final charge, alas, is incontestable. But here, to begin the year, is something positive, expressly conceived to demonstrate to everyone beyond this exclusive demographic that he is on their side — a six-point manifesto designed to make the literary world a better place for the people who labour in it.

1. TOO MANY WRITERS.
However much it may affront the sensibilities of the average arts world apparatchik, and however depressing the implications, there is no getting away from this elemental point. Ours is an overcrowded and underfunded profession, further compromised on each occasion that an MA creative writing course releases another batch of graduates onto the market. If the increasingly limited cake is to go round then, sadly, we need fewer people writing books and more people reading them.

2. TOO MANY BOOK PRIZES.
The proliferation of literary awards over the past couple of decades has removed most of the distinction that used to come with winning them. Also — something that tends to be forgotten in media excitement over the Booker or the Costa — most of the money laid out on book prizes is spent on promoting them rather than rewarding the authors who compete.

If the Booker trustees really wanted to help literature, they would do far better to cancel the prize altogether and distribute the funding in the shape of bursaries to the deserving. It goes without saying that most of these petitioners would be older writers. Arts world pundits are always keen on sponsoring the young. In fact, it is the veteran hack who needs support in these difficult times.

3. BRING BACK THE NET BOOK AGREEMENT.
Younger readers may not know that until the mid-1990s, when the opportunists swept it away, we used to have price-fixing in the UK book trade. But what is wrong with selling a book for the price marked on the cover?

One advantage was that it established a level playing field for retailers, rather than creating a situation in which an independent bookseller finds the new J.K. Rowling — list price £20, say — on sale at the Waterstones down the road at £13 and on the internet at £10.99.

You hear occasional suggestions that cheap books are "democratic" and allow greater freedom of choice. They aren't, and don't, for with high discounting all that happens is that more copies are sold of fewer titles. Curiously enough, a new Net Book Agreement would mean that many books would become less, not more expensive. Most publishers currently overprice their wares, on the assumption that Amazon and the big retailers will undercut. Oh, and nothing would be more calculated to diminish Amazon's power than an inalienable cover price.

4. PROPER SUPPORT FOR LIBRARIES.
You probably don't know the name of the current UK libraries minister. Her name is Caroline Dineage. Such is the low profile that this lady keeps that I confess I had to look her up on Wikipedia. The history of the post she occupies, certainly over the past two decades, is one of managed decline sometimes amounting to outright neglect.

The current incumbent has the ability, vested in her by the 1964 Libraries Act, to intervene wher local council st pruning its bud doesn't she? Lil the Manic Stree Preachers once memorably put us power" — w readers and the large — and the incremental de shames our cul

5. BOOKS ON TELEVISION.
Why can't the BBC run to a decen programme? Even mainstream cr were disposed to laugh at this pas autumn's effort, in which Sara Co a few literary-minded comedians around puffing the latest celebrity It doesn't have to be terrifically hi (a quality which scares the averag producer stiff).

Why not simply convene, say, I John Carey, Ben Okri and Kae Ten in a studio and get them to discus week's new books, with an accom feature in the *Radio Times*? The co would be minimal, product would sold and knowledge diffused. If th public service broadcasting, then I know what is.

6. MORE RECOGNITION FOR WI
This is a tricky one, given that mos kudos and most of the money in th book trade are bestowed on the pe who neither need them nor deser But the Royal Society of Literature Society of Authors could make a ve start by getting up a public subscri fund a tablet, executed by one of o leading engravers, for display in W ster Abbey and known as "The Ton Unknown Author". The whole ente should be begun with a round-rob to *The Times*, and I am more than I sign it myself.

The Secret Author is a former Pro of English and Creative Writing a leading British university

ILLUSTRATION BY GREG CLARKE

omeo Coates

***THE CROWN*'S CREATOR PETER MORGAN RECENTLY IG CALLS TO BE SENT TO THE TOWER AFTER SHAME- Y MISREPRESENTING THE ROYALS, THERE HAVE ALSO GROWING DEMANDS FOR "FACT" AND "FICTION" TO RE CLEARLY IDENTIFIED IN OUR HISTORIC DRAMAS. BLY OFFER A BRIEF, INTRODUCTORY GUIDE:**

SPEARE — Worry not. Thankful- eatest playwright would never amt of making up royal history suited him.

URPIN — Viewers all those o were made fools of. Real man Dick wasn't anywhere near ole or entertaining as Richard an or Sid James.

I CASSIDY AND THE NCE KID — Similarly sad to at the actual Wild West criminals me name looked nothing like wman and Robert Redford. Also hey lacked Newman and Red- opular on-screen banter.

VIII — Twenty-first century TV ls have included Ray Winstone y geezer Henry) and *The Tudors*' n Rhys Meyers (unhinged, pretty ry). If I really had to choose these two, I'd say Ray's the on historic accuracy — mainly I've worked with the old bruiser w he can bear a grudge.

ON CLEO — Bang on the

RICHARD HARRIS AS OLIVER CROMWELL — In fairness to the rogue, few would have had his nerve to portray Cromwell with an Irish accent.

BY THE SWORD DIVIDED — This scandalously overlooked 1980s BBC TV adaptation of the English Civil War is well worth revisiting for both historic accuracy and, dare I say, calibre of performance — not least because I may have been in it, and don't appear to have received a royalty cheque since 1995.

eful Dave

HE RECENT PASSING of Darth Vader star Dave Prowse — the chap from Bristol in the outfit, han the American fellow doing e — leaves me wondering r it's time to finally let go of g resentment.

ys keen to enjoy his undoubtedly ent place in the pecking order tending sci-fi conventions, Dave airness prone to hogging the t at others' expense. When he fortunately overheard yours

"Between you and me..."

truly disparagingly refer to him as a "lucky bodybuilder" during a fans' event in Liverpool — I'd just enjoyed a convivial lunch with cast members from *Blake's 7* — one came alarmingly close to feeling the "Dark Side of the Force" in all its fury.

★ **NEWS THAT** long-blooming English rose Jane Seymour was misleadingly informed by the powers that be she could still pass for "25" in an upcoming TV drama leaves former suitors incensed on her behalf.

Cast in the decades-spanning role of twelfth-century Queen consort Eleanor of Aquitaine, Jane, over 45, had been eagerly telling all and sundry — not least media types — that she'd been deemed capable of playing the character from her "mid-twenties upwards".

Knowing this treacherous business as one does, I take no pride in saying I was among those fearing the worst. Suffice it to say, the old girl was enraged to find the rug pulled from under her days later, when some fresh-faced filly trotted off with the younger part of Ms Seymour's role after all.

While cruel hindsight suggests dear Jane may have been a tad hasty making her initial announcements to the press, surely those responsible for this humiliating volte-face should hang their heads in shame!

***A WIG FITTING** for a small but pleasing screen role reassured yours truly that one can still cock a snook at Father Time when fate allows. Dressed in full PPE, the kindly girl in wardrobe acknowledged — after a little prompting — that I "definitely" looked younger as a result.*

With 2021 doubtless about to prove highly competitive on the castings front as showbiz attempts to get back on its feet, one even dared to contemplate whether such a flattering "new image" might prove professionally beneficial on a more long-term basis?

The frankly immature hilarity this caused the underperforming agent when I delicately broached the matter, once again confirms why she's wholly unfit to be managing my affairs.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY PAUL COX

FOLLOWING LAST MONTH'S distressing item regarding my brief, unfriendly encounter with a man appearing to be John Nettles on Earl's Court Road — an important update.

It now seems the individual in question may not have been the former *Midsomer Murders* and *Bergerac* star, but a charmless doppelgänger now notorious in those parts. A local source since tells me "Bad Nettles", as he's come to be nicknamed in SW5, lacks any of the real version's trademark bonhomie and is notorious for "outright rudeness" when unknowing members of the public innocently approach.

More on this when I have it...

Final cut?

AFTER READING THAT the third and previously only disappointing instalment of *The Godfather* has been re-released 30 years on in "improved" form, following a new cut by Francis Ford Coppola, I couldn't help feeling inspired.

No stranger to the botched visions of cocksure movie directors myself down the years, I was compelled to email the one surviving British filmmaker who'd had my younger self in a lead role many moons ago. Noting the original end product had not been well received in cinemas — professional pride prevents me mentioning it by r I implored him to "grasp the ne Mr Coppola has done, and fina the "grand vision" he and I lon spoke of. Pointers from this en "ruthlessly cutting down" the s involving my so-called love int was more trouble than she was and merely distracted from the essence of the piece.

I can now confirm I've since a response. While not from the himself directly, a relative or ca politely points out that as "Bria 101, he probably won't be in a p re-edit the film in question."

★ **REGULAR READERS** w the resourceful nephew r arranged a handy little sideline involves me having brief "video with longtime fans (currently £2 time). These mainly happy even have their pitfalls, alas. I shall or that one's on-screen encounter "Colin from Staffordshire" — no properly vetted beforehand — c the world can be a very dark anc place indeed.

A steal at auction

I SEE MCKELLEN has been re that (tired?) anecdote about onc stealing a beer mat from the Rov Return during a guest stint on *C tion Street* (Ian has to claim his " science" ensured he returned it following day). Naturally, forgive regarding such matters is in shor when it comes to the rest of us. V previously chose to tastefully ad on eBay a range of props accide acquired from films and TV dra down the years, all hell broke loo

Norman Lebrecht on Music

›m disaster pportunity

ERE ARE TWO WAYS of looking k on the Covid year. It was either tigated catastrophe for music and ıs, or the greatest opportunity in Ever an optimist, I take the latter 's not belittle the damage, though. hunk of the classical audience has l, never to reappear. When l concerts resumed in late summer, seventies were gone. They used to ggest demographic and the st, but survival came first. donors quit the city for country New York subscribers fled. Music lent in America until September ıen it returns, there will be empty stitutions have lost a year's Musicians will spend the rest of eers paying off loans. ness has broken out in orchestras unwaged players and highly-paid Music directors abandoned ship. etend that things will go back to y were, which would be the worst narios. Classical music currently es a 1990s rustbelt: Ohio when

ON'S ORCHESTRAL RACE WILL HAVE ER RUNNERS WHEN CAL LIFE RESUMES

es crashed, or the West Midlands rgaret Thatcher, lands without glory.

estras will struggle to export their on tours. In an age of stream-all von't pay to see the flying Philadel- vhen they can watch the Vienna Philharmonic from home. Without touring there won't be enough work to go around.

London's orchestral rat-race will have fewer runners, and fewer still when the Arts Council cuts grants. The BBC, a morale raiser in the Second World War, has failed the arts during Covid. Through even the rosiest of glasses, we are looking at a much-diminished future.

In America, musical behemoths are behaving badly. As soon as Covid landed, the Metropolitan Opera stopped paying its musicians with the aim of forcing them to accept a 30 per cent wage cut. The stagehands have been locked out.

Concert orchestras, instead of making music, are playing gesture politics with minority composers and newly installed Chief Diversity Officers. Live music is fading to a sepia-tinted memory, as seen on YouTube.

SO WHY AM I NOW so upbeat about the future? Because Covid-19 offers a once-in-a-lifetime chance to reverse practices and conceits that have pushed the artform into near-irrelevance, and to revive its mass audience. If you want to know how low it has sunk in public waters, ask your next cab driver to name a classical star. Lang Lang is all you'll get.

Thirty years ago you could have had Pavarotti, Kiri, Kennedy, Solti, Menuhin, Jessye Norman, a dozen more. In terms of fame, we lost the game. The system failed to deliver talent that could command a Saturday-night television slot. The Three Tenors will never happen again. Rock bottom, however, is not a bad place to start rebuilding.

When I got the concert habit in my twenties everyone around me in the Royal Festival Hall was roughly my age, many of us clutching miniature scores to make sure the conductor was getting it right.

True, we sat in the cheap seats behind the orchestra but so did the junior doctors and nurses who cadged free tickets off a one-legged hospital porter called Frank who made sure the hall stayed full.

Pioneers: The Kanneh-Mason family

JAKE TURNEY/UNIVERSAL MUSIC

Classical music was a great place to impress a date. Whatever happened to us?

Simple. We got married and had kids. Music lost interest in us. Where churches and synagogues provided childcare, concert halls couldn't care less. Our seats were sold to silver hairdos with disposable incomes and students grew uncomfortable among the dominant gerontocracy. Nobody gave an actuarial thought to the death of the audience.

Now's the chance to reclaim that future. Offer young couples sensibly-priced tickets and an hour away from the kids and they'll come rushing back. Concerts will anyway be shorter than before. The 90-minute limit imposed in Covid will become the new normal. Audiences also like the lack of a drinks interval with £5 ice-creams and a long queue at the bar.

Shorter concerts save rehearsal time and allow an orchestra to play the same music twice in an evening, selling twice as many tickets. Variable concert times reflect new working habits. Nine to five office life is over. Most people got used to working from home during Covid and at hours when their Far Eastern partners were awake.

Two concerts a night will suit a broader working audience. As for the short form, how often have you sat through two works you don't like in order to hear the one that you do? No reason ever to do that again.

Music directors are maxed out. Orchestras have a new position of Resident Conductor, a local stick who can drop in at

an hour's notice and won't be blighted by quarantine. Local is the new global. Pop-up concerts, announced a day or two before as Covid rules ease, are proving popular.

THE KANNEH-MASONS are proof of localisation. An East Midlands household who caught the eye when cellist Sheku played at the Harry-Meghan wedding, the family has turned into a factory of chamber musicians whose enthusiasm attracts young audiences of varied backgrounds.

Sheku now tops the bill of half the British orchestras and is making inroads in America. Birmingham Opera has found a music director in Alpesh Chauhan, a British-Asian who lives a bus-ride away and is extravagantly gifted. The pianist Martin James Bartlett, 24, used his lockdown time to learn music by composers his own age. Are you getting the picture? We're talking grassroots revolution here.

Old music businesses have gone bust and more will follow. Boutique agencies are springing up with new talents. The Royal Opera House is pitching to youth-culture Scala Radio. The stage is set for new rules of engagement. What was it Marx said about losing our chains?

I can't promise that all or any of the above will sweep away the dinosaurs and make a thousand flowers bloom, but 2021 presents the best chance for change in living memory. If we don't grasp it, classical music is truly dead.

Robert Thicknesse on Opera

Cheer leaders

I THINK IT WAS Auberon Waugh, or one of that gang, who pointed out that there's nothing like Mozart's well-known Classic FM standby *Alleluia* for gradually but catastrophically lowering the spirits. This would-be jubilant peroration is a handy flag-waver for stuff we greet with open hearts, and even quite enjoy to begin with, but soon realise we need to strangle or beat to death — the chief example being the period of Yuletide revelry which, for the first time in centuries, has been made so happily optional this year.

Opera, like some sulky teenager, has always refused to have any truck with these festivities. Not for us the rancid cheese of the *Nutcracker* ballet, *It's a Wonderful Life*, *Aladdin* with Ant 'n' Dec, the cursed Tiny Tim: that nauseating offal that clogs up the usual avenues of escape. (True, in Germany they will insist on sticking on the opera version of *Hansel & Gretel*, which features some rather sickening angels, but that's hardly our problem.)

It's not just Christmas — opera gets antsy at anything that smacks of religion, in which it bears a striking resemblance to the Church of England: when not simply pretending there is no such thing as Christianity it would appear to be actively engaged in plotting the downfall of the whole operation.

Naturally, both outfits squeal camply after the atmospherics: twilit cloisters are constantly stalked by cowled figures, there are tolling bells and distant organs intoning boring tunes a-go-go. But this is all about as actually Christian as Matthew Lewis's naughty monk.

Opera lays out its objections from the whistle. In Claudio Monteverdi's 1641 *Coronation of Poppea*, Cupid, in s award-winning blasphemy, nicks t climactic line of Dante's *Paradiso*, ecstatic vision of the Triune Godhe applies it to his horn: behold, if you actual "Love that moves the sun ar other stars".

Thereafter, priests pop up mere as the patsies in cheap jokes, or to people on bonfires. Christian feast none too auspicious, either, and ri derision: the bloodbaths of *Cav &* happen, uncoincidentally, at Easte the Assumption respectively.

Why has opera got such a down the God squad? Essentially becaus are tussling over the same what's-i abaht bit of the agenda, the same t which admittedly in their present circumstances looks a bit like two going head-to-head for the last sh patch between pools of vomit in th doorway of Greggs.

And opera's bid to supplant reli

OPERA UNSWERVINGL BELIEVES IN THE POTENTIAL FOR A DIV SPARK IN HUMANS

been known to backfire: those blo Siegfried and Parsifal auditioning new Jesus were swiftly undermine real-life heart-throbs like Reinhar Heydrich and Baldur von Schirac claiming their inheritance.

AS OPERA FANNIES around in d irrelevancies, it seeks to conceal i programme — which really consi scouting about for reasons to be c a world full of arseholes, located indifferent or malevolent univers opera unswervingly believes in th potential for a divine spark in hur (even the arseholes), generally ig fanned by love.

This is best expressed in odd, pieces of which the acme is no d Mozart's *Magic Flute*, a kind of id

clairvoyance expressed through a
nix of panto and esoteric fooflah.
ody really knows what turns the
om a fairytale adorned by a bunch
slogans into a serious manifesto to
he face of the earth: Mozart's
ack late style, the radiance of his
ny and a transfixing wizardry in
an economy, clarity and warmth
argely down to the lucky accident of
ting at just the right moment
n the mathematical perfection of
oque and the wild subjectivity of
ven.
tly it's the adamant conviction
this brew of folksy romps, earnest
counterpoint, bells that make evil
away, hymns, crazed rage-arias and
etest of love songs: Mozart's
e sureness that true wisdom is born
n love, that with a bit of faith and a
voidance of falsehood — and
a magic flute — the earthly
e is a serious possibility. As with
Hardy's Christmas cows, you catch
believing, or at least hoping, it
e so.
s all fine and dandy, but hardly the
this of all seasons of heavily
l goodwill. For that we must turn
ue Christmas poster boy, Goethe's
oet Werther, the guy who turned
le of Europe into self-pitying emos
efore Kurt Cobain's first minor-key
whinge.

Yet in Jules Massenet's fey romantic opera, this pill has one big, unarguable redemptive moment: deranged for the love of his mate's wife, and by the sheer horror of an old-time
r Christmas with its carolling
noppets, foul *glühwein* and
roistering, he chooses the day
p himself in a particularly messy,
it and attention-seeking way.
ik we can all applaud levels of
ike those.

Sarah Ditum on Pop

Dress sense

SOMETIMES I WONDER if everyone's heart is really in the culture war. When America's top contrarian, Candace Owens, saw singer Harry Styles wearing an elegant cornflower-blue lace Gucci dress on *Vogue*'s December cover, surely even she felt a wave of tiredness at the inevitability of what she was about to do.

And yet, relentless as gravity, the logic of the discourse compelled her to hit the tweet button and say her piece: "The steady feminisation of our men at the same time that Marxism is being taught to our children is not a coincidence," she fumed. "Bring back manly men."

There's a lot to enjoy about Owens's attack, including but not limited to the idea that Marxist twenty-first-century style would show up in several thousand pounds-worth of smocking. It's a gorgeous gown, but it's not exactly prole-wear.

If you want to see some manly men, in fact, I recommend a short tour of vintage Soviet labour propaganda posters, which you will find are simply bulging with powerful muscles straining at the fabric of sober workwear. Phwoar, check out the quotas on him.

AS THE WEST WAS WINNING the Cold War, pop music was offering a very different version of masculinity to the Moscow ideal. The Seventies were all about glam — a genre which, frankly, makes Styles's efforts look like something you'd see on a footballer.

Actually, scratch that, because even the footballers were dangerously girly by current standards, with their luscious shoulder-length hair and honed pecs peeking out from singlets. Which meant the pop stars had so much further to go if they wanted to make an impression.

In *Shock and Awe* — his chronicle of glam — the critic Simon Reynolds puts it like this: "If the Sixties were about the White Negro, Bowie was guessing — gambling — that the defining crossover of the Seventies might be the Straight Gay."

Rock'n'roll was invented when white musicians crossed the colour bar to raid rhythm and blues; glam was about boys crashing out of their gender confines and into the glorious, pouting world of the feminine. And if there's a greater tribute to capitalist individualism than David Bowie dragged up as three different backing singers in the "Boys Keep Swinging" video, I haven't seen it.

Would you trust David Bowie to fix your car?

Bowie, obviously, was playing along the frightening, thrilling edge of androgyny. So were Roxy Music — a riot of animal prints, lurex and trousers so punishingly tight that they crossed the line from "sexually ambiguous" to "oof, definitely a bloke". Both made music with a sheen of sleaze, and the way their look blurred man into woman was an intimation of the blurring of bodies that happens in sex.

BOWIE'S BISEXUALITY notwithstanding, sometimes genderbending can be hot in a surprisingly straight way: think of Prince's "If I Was Your Girlfriend", in which the narrator fantasies about swapping sex so he can get closer to his girlfriend.

And if there was something ultimately quite straight about some of glam's practitioners, sex seemed barely in the picture at all with others: Dave Hill wore some astonishing high-heeled boots, but I defy anyone to think of listening to Slade as an erotic experience.

The bespangled splendour of glam didn't necessarily imply a radical attack on the sexual order. Part of it was just boys being boys, showing off on stage. After all, it's not as if glam was exactly flush with

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS; TWITTER

also (of necessity) a craftily simple production: this is hardly the time for expensive sets, with one slightly odd moment of beauty at the end, which needed a bit more thinking through.

Friedman's backing gifts the play a range of surprise star guests, hauled onto stage to be sent up by the two young comics, oblivious to their significance. It's a trick as old as Angela Rippon and the late Des O'Connor being ritually humiliated by Morecambe and Wise — a pantomime for grown-ups. On our night, it was *Gavin and Stacey's* Rob Brydon fitting neatly into a slapstick about nothing going right.

Having your star actor tasered and locked in a backstage cupboard before being sent back to sit in the audience is a reminder that burlesque travesty, from Shakespeare's identity switches in *The Comedy of Errors* to Richard Bean's brilliant adaptation of the *commedia dell'arte* triumph *One Man Two Guvnors*, is always about inversion — of fortunes, power or expectation.

The old-timers Sid and Jimmy harbour the oldest and most thwarted dream of actors down the ages: never to have to give it up or be superseded. Their Gen-Z avatars feel like the kind of talented, funny kids you meet at university or in their first jobs, hungry and anxious for fame which will also prove evanescent. Clint McKie, the (never glimpsed) Hollywood mogul roars into town and out again, a catalyst for chaos and mirth in the Greek tradition of a wandering god. *The Comeback* is not rich enough in its characterisations or development to be a great farce and it sags a bit in the middle. But it's a very creditable attempt at giving audiences starved of performance a tasty *amuse-gueule* to tide us over to the sunlit uplands of 2021.

And if you aren't able to see it, do have a look at Owen and Ashenden's menu of online send ups of 2020, from Mum-on-Zoom — "You're still mute, Mum, click the button. No, the one with the mic on it at the bottom left" — to the many ways to get fired during an online seminar. It's just like real life at the moment — with a lot more laughs.

Anne McElvoy is senior editor at the *Economist*

Christopher Silvester on Cinema

Diversity season again

Viola Davis and Chadwick Boseman in *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*

NETFLIX

WITH MOST CINEMAS in the United States and Europe closed, and the major studios holding back most of their 2020 releases until the end of next year, including Steven Spielberg's remake of the musical *West Side Story*, we are entering an untypical awards season.

Because of the Covid pandemic, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences has decided that it will host an in-person ceremony on 25 April, two months later than usual, and accordingly has extended the eligibility period for entries by two months (from 31 December, 2020, to 28 February 2021), which means a seven-month period of campaigning.

This year is an embarrassment of riches in terms of possible Best Picture candidates with African-American stories and directors. First up is *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, directed by George C. Wolfe, who is better known for his theatre direction, and produced by Denzel Washington.

The film is adapted from Pulitzer Prize-winner August Wilson's play of the same name, set in Chicago in 1927, and is essentially a showcase for two superlative acting performances by Viola Davis, who plays "Mother of the Blues" Ma Rainey, and Chadwick Boseman, who plays impassioned young trumpeter Levee.

A first feature for actress and TV director Regina King, *One Night in Miami*, is adapted by Kemp Powers from his own stage play and portrays a fictional encounter between boxer Muhammad Ali, radical activist Malcolm X, pro football player Jim Brown, and soul singer Sam Cooke in a Miami hotel room following Ali's surprise victory over Sonny Liston in February 1964. British actor Kingsley Ben-Adir takes the role of Malcoln

Then there is *Judas and the Bla Messiah*, directed by Shaka King, v tells the story of Fred Hampton (D Kaluuya), the Chicago Black Panth revolutionary socialist betrayed by

WHAT MAKES CHLOÉ Z WORK SO REMARKABL THAT SHE IS ABLE TO G UNDER THE SKIN OF AMERICA'S HEARTLAN

informant William O'Neal (LaKeith Stanfield) and assassinated in a po in December 1969. Of course, this i competing with *The Trial of the Ch* which depicts another episode fro same period in American radical h

And finally there is *The United S Billie Holiday*, directed by Lee Dan previously nominated for Best Dire *Precious* (2009), and starring singe writer Andra Day. Nobody has had

nd its release has been scheduled
ery end of the extended eligibility

'ROM THESE FILMS, there
· tips to the diversity matrix.
va is a restrained weepie about a
nosexual couple, in which Colin
ım watches Stanley Tucci's Tusker
into dementia. Both are
ties in the acting categories.
he director of *Nomadland*, Chloé
the first Asian woman likely to be
ed in the Best Director category.
t makes her work so remarkable is
is able to get under the skin of
's heartland, as evidenced by her
merican drama *Songs My Brothers*
Me (2015) and *The Rider* (2017),
e dreams and broken lives of rodeo
, of which
Globe critic
ough wrote
chieves what
s capable of at
It reproduces a
ith such
ss, fidelity, and
that it transcends the mundane
ches on the universal."
Best Actor category is already
to be a battle between pale, though
y not stale, Anthony Hopkins for
n *The Father*, Florian Zeller's film
own play about an elderly man
ıcing the gradual deterioration of
ties, and Chadwick Boseman, who
maturely from complications of
ncer, aged 43, in August 2019, for
in *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*.
kins is hoping for his second
fter Hannibal Lecter in 1991), but
ıan receives a posthumous Oscar,
e only the second leading actor to
llowing Peter Finch for *Network*
hough Finch died after being
ted, not before. By the way, if
ever seen Boseman's magnificent
l of soul singer James Brown in
Up (2014), you should definitely
ut.
Actress is probably going to be a
oman race between Viola Davis as
ey, Frances McDormand in
land, and Vanessa Kirby in *Pieces of*

a Woman (about the loss of a child in a home birth through botched midwifery, and the subsequent court case). But don't ignore the possibility of Andra Day coming from the back of the field.

ONCE AGAIN WE ARE about to witness the now-familiar battle for recognition between the traditional studios and the upstart streamers. Without a doubt, the streamers have had a good pandemic. They sustained us when cinemas were forced to close and the studios chose to postpone their big-ticket releases.

Will 2021 be the year when Netflix achieves its first Oscar for Best Picture (for *The Trial of the Chicago 7* or *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* or *Mank*)? Or might Amazon Studios snatch the prize with *One Night in Miami*? Will it be *The Father*, a French-British co-production from Sony Pictures Classics? Or *Nomadland*, from Disney's Searchlight Pictures?

Although it offers plenty of guilty pleasures for cinephiles, *Mank* is probably too austere and recondite to win the ultimate prize, so I think the real battle will be between *The Trial of the Chicago 7*, writer-director Aaron Sorkin's well-crafted 1970 courtroom drama, with its crowd-pleasing, emotionally uplifting ending and its cluster of fine performances, and *Nomadland*, in which Fern (Frances McDormand) travels in a van through the American West after losing everything in the Great Recession and encounters similarly deracinated nomads.

Both films have launched their campaigns early in the season, with *Nomadland* becoming the first film ever to win the top awards at both the Venice and Toronto festivals, and *The Trial* being released in cinemas at the end of September and streamed the following month.

The Trial is a hymn of liberal self-congratulation in this year of the Fall of Trump, and that will surely energise some Academy members. But *Nomadland* seeks to understand the mindset of those who have been left behind. Another choice between libtards and deplorables.

Adam LeBor on Television

Memories of a massacre

WHEN A MAN REACHES a certain age, his thoughts to turn to the three G's — grandchildren, gardening and genealogy. In my case — 59, since you ask — as my teenage children are still at school it's too soon for the first, and while I love a beautiful garden I don't have the patience to nurture one.

But I have spent a good part of my career digging out information, making connections, mapping networks and then writing about them, so genealogy definitely appeals. Every family has its stories — and secrets — some shared, others not, but we all want to know more about who we really are and where we came from. Nowadays ancestry websites make it incredibly easy to find a treasure trove of information with a few clicks on the keyboard. Like everyone, I have four potential lines to explore.

On my mother's side, I know that my grandfather, Ernest Abra, fought in the First World War in the Middle East and that his wife, my grandmother Ethel, lost two brothers in the conflict. We have a splendid photograph of grandfather Ernest sitting on his horse at Baghdad railway station.

On my father's side both my grandparents, Barnett and Lily, were born in what was then Russia and came to Britain to escape the Tsar's pogroms and build a new life. Like many east European Jews, they settled in the East End until they were bombed out, then relocated to north London.

A COUPLE OF HOURS digging online brought forth a rich haul: census records, registers of births and deaths, newspaper announcements of betrothals and marriage. What little we knew about our family origins in Russia was that the Lebors supposedly came from a place today called Ashmyany, now in Belarus, about 35 miles

Angela Cohen (Rinder's mother), Leon Rytz (last survivor of Treblinka death camp) and Robert Rinder at Treblinka

south-east of Vilna, the capital of Lithuania.

I have a rare family artefact from those times, a Hebrew book called *Chayei Adam*, by Rabbi Avraham Danzig, a treatise on the laws of daily conduct and Jewish observance. The thin, fragile paper has turned brown with age but the Russian lettering *Vilna, 1868* is still clear. It may have originally belonged to my great-grandfather, Abraham Judah.

One of the most fascinating documents I found was the March 1912 naturalisation certificate of my paternal great-uncle, Israel (Isidore). Buried in the formal but touching legalese of Israel's oath of allegiance to King George V, and the declaration that he was "hereby naturalised as a British Subject," entitled to "all political and other rights, powers and privileges" and subject to the same obligations as a natural-born British subject, was something new.

Israel was a subject of Russia, but his birthplace was listed as Divenisok, in the province of Vilna, just over 20 miles south-west of Ashmyany. Nowadays the town is called Dieveniskes, the last sizeable settlement in a finger of Lithuanian territory surrounded by Belarus.

I RECENTLY WATCHED a new two-part BBC documentary called *My Family, the Holocaust and Me*. Presented by Robert Rinder, the programme tells the story of three British Jewish families who have been affected by the Holocaust: Rinder's own, that of Bernie Graham, and sisters Natalie and Louisa Clein. The Cleins want to know more about the fate of their great-aunt Els, a brave woman who was active in the resistance. Els was caught and eventually killed, like much of Dutch Jewry, in the Sobibor extermination camp.

Bernie Graham wants to understand more about his grandfather, who survived Buchenwald, where he was tortured and lost an eye. But it was the fate of Rinder's family that gave me a sharp intake of breath. His relatives, he learns, came from Dieveniskes.

Rinder's documentary is the kind of television at which the BBC excels: intelligently presented, sensitive and non-sensational, letting the power of the material, and its horror, stand on its own.

The fate of Lithuanian Jewry is well documented. About 90 per cent of the 160,000 Lithuanian Jews were killed, often with extreme brutality. The SS had plentiful helpers among the local police and auxiliary forces. In Kaunas, a man known as the "Death Dealer" beat local Jews to death with an iron bar while spectators watched.

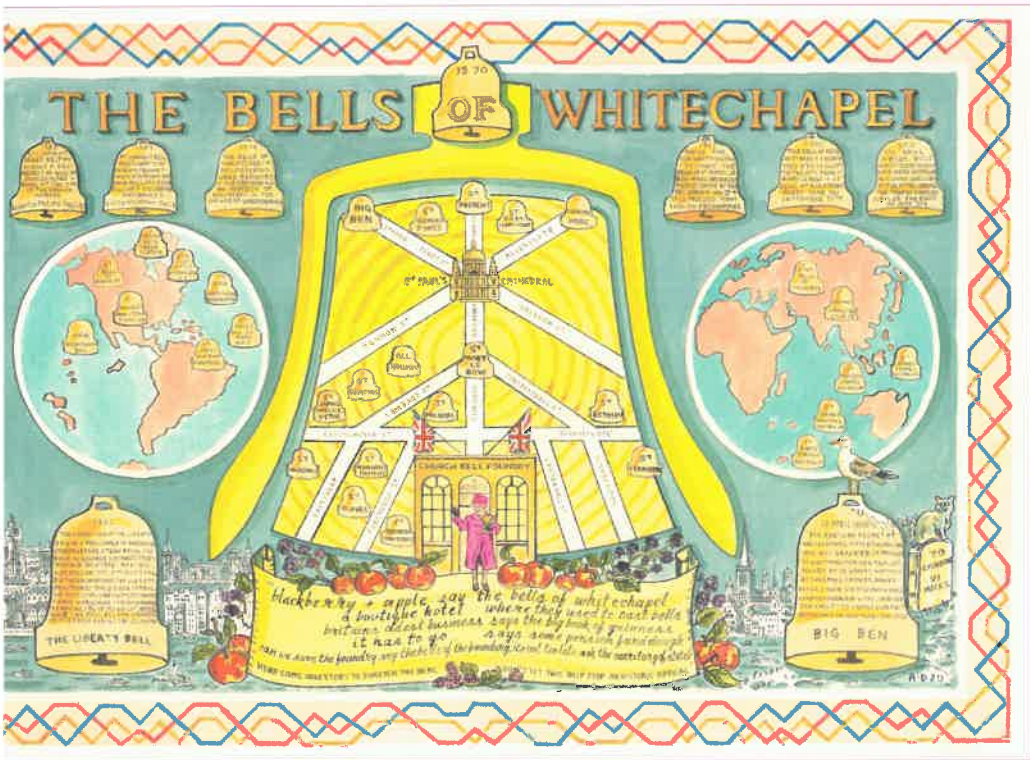
In summer 1942 the Jews of Dieveniskes were marched to Voranava, a small town now in Belarus. There they were lined up and machine-gunned into a ditch, now a long mound on the edge of town. The most moving part of the programme, one quite hard to watch, is Rinder's interview with Helena Sheshko, an elderly lady who as a child witnessed the massacre. After the grave was filled in, the earth, she recalls, kept moving.

I know nothing of what happened to any family members who may have stayed behind in Dieveniskes or Ashmyany. My searches so far on various Holocaust databases have turned up no leads. Jewish wartime genealogy is generally a bleak affair. We have now hired a researcher in Vilna to go into the archives.

Part of me fears what she will discover, but it is our duty to try and find out. If and when we learn the names of our relatives and their fate, we will at least be able to mourn them.

BBC

Visit The Critic onli
for exclusive politica
commentary, feature
and book reviews. W
insights from our
Political Editor Grah
Stewart, columnists
Joshua Rozenberg a
Norman Lebrecht, a
contributors includi
Toby Young, Alexanc
Larman, Kapil
Komireddi, Dominic
Green and Jeremy Bl
The Critic website
contains a feast of
essential reading for
the inquisitive mind.
www.thecritic.co.uk



he Bells of Whitechapel
y Adam Dant

Critic's limited edition print

m Dant introduces Bells of Whitechapel:

int shows the historic significance of Britain's manufacturing business, across the globe a part of the deep fabric of London's culture mmunity.

m St Mary le Bow, Cheapside, whose peal sly bestows the status of 'cockney' and was ast across occupied Europe as a clarion of m and liberty during the war, to St Clement , the bells of the City churches ring out.

s of famous bells, such as the Liberty Bell, ailed around the border which is decorated bell-ringing diagram.

ond Big Ben and Great Tom, a map of the globe ed with locations of a few of the countless bells itechapel Foundry has cast. Its history spans the reigns of 27 monarchs. Elizabeth II is depicted on her 2009 visit to this celebrated Whitechapel institution, in existence since the reign of Elizabeth I.

"'Oranges & Lemons' has been updated to sing out the threat to the Whitechapel Bell Foundry of being ignominiously transformed into a boutique hotel with bell-casting reduced to the production of souvenir handbells in the lobby espresso bar."

Adam Dant has produced two editions:

'The Bells of Whitechapel' (30"x 22") in an edition of 50 copies, each signed and dated by the artist: £250 with 50% of profits donated to Save the Whitechapel Bell Foundry.

'The Bells of Whitechapel' (30" x 22") in an edition of ten copies, each hand-coloured, signed and dated by the artist: £550 with 50% of profits donated to Save the Whitechapel Bell Foundry.

Contact atelierdant@gmail.com for purchase inquiries

LISA HILTON salutes a superlatively-sauced London institution
THIS PAGE

FELIPE FERNÁNDEZ-ARMESTO chooses ambience over aphrodisiacs for Valentines's Day
PAGE 99

CHRISTOPHER PINCHER gratefully slams the door on 2020 with a shimmering classic champagne
PAGE 100

CHRISTOPHER NORTH on the link between bullfighting and the Catholic view of death
PAGE 101

PATRICK GALBRAITH says country sports can be a valuable source of male friendship
PAGE 102

HEPHZIBAH AN
says compost's bl
is the heart of any
PA

NICK COHEN blam
vanity for his
PA

HANNAH BETTS
search of chic alte
to lour
PA

THOMAS WOO
SMITH on t
dance of
PA

TOM CHE
on the allure of
railway m
PA

CLAUDIA SAVAG
on the best
for the
PA

EATING OUT

Primary sauces

Lisa Hilton savours a timeless French bistro in Pimlico that displays no timidity with the ladle

THE PACE OF DECLINE is a relative thing. Lamenting the sack of Rome by the Goths in 410, St Jerome wailed, "The whole world has died with one city". Perhaps it looked that way from the cave in Palestine, but the scholar's dramatic grief contrasts with other contemporary evidence that despite a decline in material living standards evinced by the quality of pottery and roof tiles, the Germanic rulers continued to repair public buildings, use Latin and generally appreciate a "sub" if not wholly "Roman" lifestyle.

And in the East, the Empire continued for another thousand years. Roman culture did not vanish overnight if only because its sudden disappearance was still being mourned in the sixth century by the British historian Gildas in highly elaborate prose. If the world was indeed as "ruined and unkempt" as Gildas claimed, for whom (and moreover on what) was he writing?

Whether it was meteoric or glacial, one factor in the fall of Rome on which diverse historians agreed was the nefarious influence of fancy sauces.

TACITUS APPROVED of the dietary purity of the new Germanic masters of Rome, applauding the simplicity of wild fruit, fresh game and curdled milk. In contrast, Musonius Rufus viewed them as dull-witted carnivores whose souls were darkened by meat.

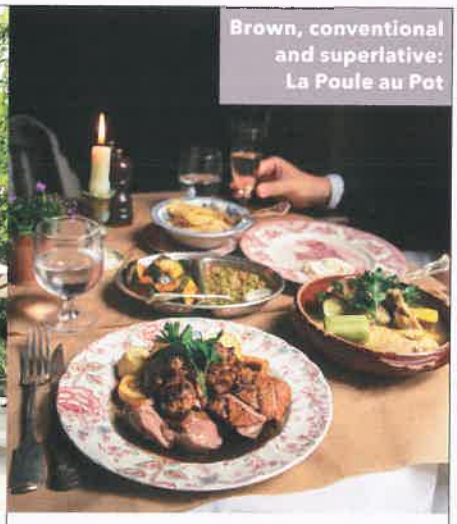
Both concurred, however, that sauce oiled the path to decadence, with those who "wallow in the pickles" and complex reductions having only themselves to blame. This view was endorsed by St John Cassian of Marseilles, who observed that an excessive appreciation of sauces inevitably led to fornication.

Like the Roman Empire, it seems that classic French food has bee declining and falling ever since (*right*) identified the five "Granc Sauces" (Béchamel, Velouté, Espagnole, Tomate and Hollandaise) in the nineteenth century as the components "without which it is impossible to create a good dinner".

Adam Gopnik was investigating the "crisis" in French cooking back in 1997, whilst last year the journalist We Stevenson claimed it had declin "a tyranny of meat in brown sau

Yet might the fact that French still occupy 10 per cent of the W Best Restaurants List and the popularity of neoclassical restau like Bouillon Pigalle and the nev opened Bouillon Republique in which offer (presently takeaway straightforward, modestly price

TABLE TALK BY JONNY HANNAH; WRITERS' PORTRAITS BY VANESSA DELL



Brown, conventional and superlative: La Poule au Pot

rings of staples such as leeks rette and boeuf bourguignon st that endless handwringing decline is actually a sign of ? French food has had to support usually heavy burden of ation for over a century, but nce is no more a signal of decline ontinuity of success.

EWS OF THE EMPIRE'S collapse has yet to reach Pimlico, where the Poule au s been offering the same French for about as long as anyone can nber. There are many things to out the dear old Poule, from the t triangle of pavement terrace to otine-tan tin ceilings and the ime candles on the tables, but d still reigns supreme. Not because it isn't entirely formulaic and predictable, but because it is. I don't know what's going on backstage, but I doubt that nowadays the kitchen is adhering to Escoffier's hierarchy of the brigade — six ranks of cook and a minimum of eight preparation stations. Nonetheless the dishes remain brown, conventional and insouciantly superlative.

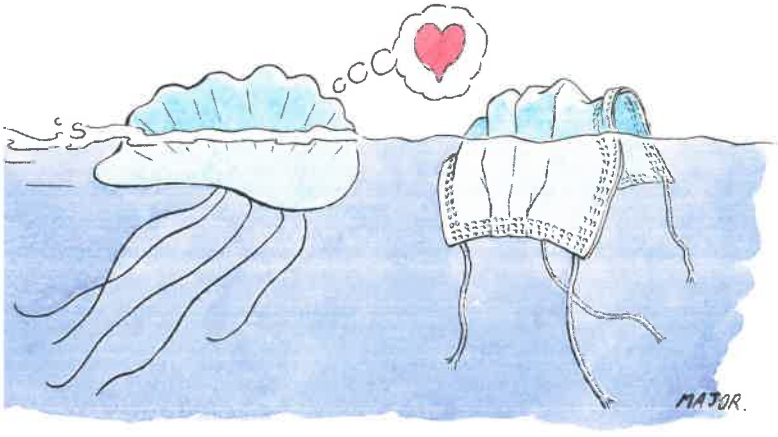
French food should be what my Great Aunt Ethel used to call "wet", and there's no timidity with the ladle at the Poule. Onion soup is intense and acorn-tinged, onion tart a more timid caramel, Sauternes jelly quivers its amber over foie gras, coq au vin, roast guinea fowl, rabbit in mustard sauce, veal in cream and mushroom sauce, an unapologetic symphony from beige to mahogany. It might be fashionable to claim that the road to culinary hell is slick with sauce, but no one round here is complaining.

Aside from the pan-fried fresh foie gras (*avec son verre de Monbazillac, bien sur*), my favourite thing about the Poule is the sides. They arrive in cheerful little copper pans, unassuming supporting acts, alert to their own dignity as an old-school brasserie waiter. Creamed spinach, softly-stewed peas with lettuce and pearl onion, supple green beans with flaked almonds and the best *pommes dauphinoises* in London, all of it creamy, buttery, mostly brownish and much the better for it. Tarte tatin, chocolate mousse and crème brûlée follow much the same principle.

I HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE to discover how long it took the conquerors of the Western Empire to rediscover a taste for sauce, but Roman garum was still being used at the court of Charlemagne.

While the "barbarian" kings pottered about amidst the ruins, chatting in Latin and replastering the odd temple, they didn't know that they were inhabiting a vanished world, since their world was still with them. The food at the Poule remains contentedly delicious, with no place for nostalgia on the menu.

La Poule au Pot, 231 Ebury Street, London SW1W 8UT, 020 7730 7763



LA POULE AU POT; CARTOON BY TIM MAJOR

EATING IN

Kisses in the dark

Choose ambience over aphrodisiacs for Valentine's Day, says Felipe Fernández-Armesto

"SCIENTIFIC EXPERIMENT shows," proclaimed my English poetry primer, "that moonlight on stained glass does not produce this effect." The footnote was to a line in *The Eve of St Agnes* — the only poem with a description of sexual intercourse approved for young minds — in which "warm gules" appear like brothel-neon on the heroine's "fair breast", while "her fragrant bodice creeps rustling to her knees." (Maybe Keats didn't know that St Agnes defended her virtue even in a bordello.)

The hero — "ethereal, flushed and like a throbbing star" — produces a feast of aphrodisiacs from a handily placed cupboard. Then "into her dream he melted, as the rose blendeth its odour with the violet."

The two most notable saints in the calendar for January and February, Agnes and Valentine, have been appropriated, despite their chastity, as pretexts for erotic eating. In a cold climate, love is a seasonal dish.

Open allure: Jan Steen's *The Oyster Girl*

Keats's menu had the typical taste and texture of a love feast: sweet, sticky and squelchy, featuring "quince and plum and gourd and jellies soother than the creamy curd." The "spicèd dainties" had the extra allure of exoticism — "from silken Samarcand to cedar'd Lebanon." The original St Agnes would have been unmoved. She dismissed her suitor's gifts, somewhat unappetisingly, as "nutriment of sin and food of death".

The legend, however, that lovers appear to sleeping virgins on 19th January licensed Keats's fantasy search for effective aphrodisiac continued undaunted. Readers planning menus for St Agnes's St Valentine's Day may apprecia word to the wise.

MAGICIANS and proc in every society have encouraged the ques Thrashed borage seeds, accordi one school of thought, were the aphrodisiac of choice in paleoli times. They don't work for me.

Pythagoras, mythicized as a mathematician and proto-scier was a magus, whose followers b that he had a golden penis. "Th wretch," he warned the erotical susceptible, who knew that pro feed passion, "abstain from bea Most dietitians have detected n except flatulence.

Truffles are widely fancied. I Savarin put their reputation to t "*Honi soit qui mal y pense*," he r to those who accused him of "a investigation indelicate and like provoke cynical laughter. The p truth is always praiseworthy." C his interviewees confessed that guest became uncharacteristica importunate after a supper of "s truffled fowl from Périgord . . . W can I say, Monsieur? I put it all the truffles."

As my primer might have sai scientific experiment does not her inference. *The High Sexuali* however, reports that truffles co hormones "identical to those contained in the male boar's sa the time of mating". Which part anatomy is the author trying to

Supposedly suggestive foods asparagus tips, felt between fin the slither and softness of the v shaped mussel — recall squelc organs and sexual fluids to suit disposed minds.

The open allure of the oyster whose shell Aphrodite sprang, stimulant to lust in the Dutch G

"I think the whole working-from-home thing has actually strengthened our relationship."

CARTOON BY WILBUR DAWBARN

'hat else is Jan Steen's "Oyster ffering on the side? There is :edness as appetising as a l grape's.

OF THESE NOSTRUMS WORKS. ıgh eating and sex seem to be ementary, mutually lubricating of sensuality, every alleged lisiac is a kiss in the dark. ıe recipes are unfalsifiable ;e impractical or ironic. One of ın Douglas's in *Venus in the ɔ*, begins, "Take a young crane." ɜr involves "several brains of parrows and a half quantity of ıins of pigeons which have not ;un to fly". We are in the realm of ɔells and amulets, though ıs also recommends, equally ɔably, chicken curry. Some, I ;e, like it hot.

gnes and St Valentine will 'e eaters who honour their feasts ɜnuinely heart-warming, :spelling dishes, instead of ıg in pagan love-rites. For the , a navarin of one of the saint's shorn lambs is ideal: trysting are supposed to prepare for her ' weaving the wool.

ımelise fatty pieces, then cook :o melting point, with garlic baby turnips, and tiny carrots. serving, sprinkled with parsley ɔpped anchovies, add whole es and a splash of brown sherry. ılentine's reputation for putting ogether may derive from the habits of doves that coo in ry: this year, his feast occurs just Lent; so pigeon's breasts will ı, in a rich stock, stirred with a ;loe gin, mushrooms, cream and ınt sage and garlic.

the other hand, you want to try menu, the ingredients are still .e. The lovers never got round to hem: they had other priorities .arge before their hurried ent. It goes to show that an ɜ atmosphere is more ive than affected food.

CHRISTOPHER PINCHER ON WINE

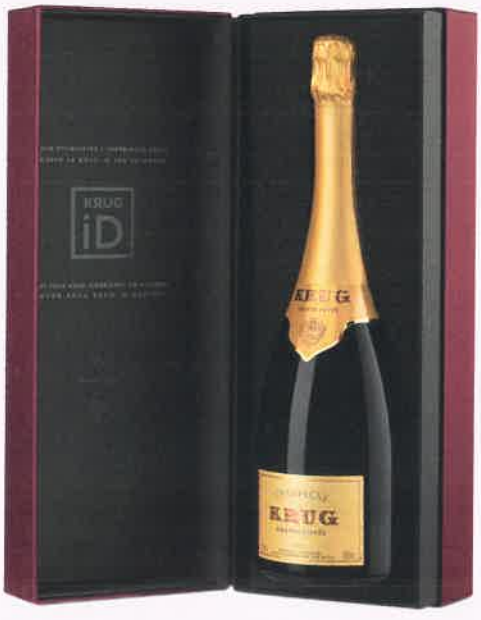
Ring in the new . . . please

"And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year . . . make damn sure it leaves then slam the gate shut. We won't be wanting that year back!" With apologies to the literary executors and admirers of Minnie Louise Haskins's inspirational poem, that is the way I suspect most of us feel about 2020. What was meant to usher in the Roaring Twenties, a new decade of dash and elan, was ushered out as the most risible and rotten year for just about everybody in mortal memory.

But the year has turned, and we too must turn our faces forward. We must raise a toast to the future; and toasts should be drunk with champagne. In the land of shimmering champers, at least in my opinion, Krug is king.

KRUG
CHAMPAGNE

Since 1843, six generations of the family have devoted themselves to Joseph Krug's mission to make the essence of champagne "pleasure itself". With the *Grand Cru Cuvée (166th)* it is difficult to disagree. Near perfect perlage, this wine fair dances in its glass; it is nearly as much fun to watch as it is to drink. And why not? Sparkling conversation is all the more scintillating when served up with a sensational spumante. But the moment cannot be put off forever so, *carpe diem, carpe vitrum*. One salutes champagne by sipping. This Krug returns the compliment with a tart satsuma sensation as it trips over the tongue followed by a light, tight, nutty effervescence as the liquid washes away, leaving little or nothing behind.



All the best wines clean up as they go and in the 2010 base vintage you will find a first-class freshener. It may not have the grandeur of Dom Perignon, and it may usually be cheaper (though not much), but Krug is as clipped and elegant as its single syllable.

It is ideal for lifting the spirit and lighting up a darkening winter afternoon. So, if you have the chance, or the wherewithal to buy a bottle, these bubbles will brighten your family bubble and provide an alternative vaccine until the real thing provides more permanent inoculation against the memory of last year.

Christopher Pincher is Minister of State for Housing

COURTESY OF KRUG CHAMPAGNE

SOL Y SOMBRA

The final frontier

Christopher North says bullfighting thrives in a culture where death is discussed, not hidden

CATHOLICS ARE PECULIARLY morbid. That, at any rate, struck me as the most plausible explanation. It must have been 15 years ago, and I was with a group of English-speaking aficionados learning hands-on capework in the breeders' practice rings around Salamanca.

We were a mixed group — three Americans, two Scots, a Dutchman, a German and an Irishman — all of us bloody-minded enough to embrace an art-form reviled in our own countries. But, given our nationalities, there was a statistically bizarre absence of Protestants. We weren't all observant, far from it; but we all came from a cultural milieu in which death is marked and discussed rather than hidden and euphemised.

When I got home, my shins bruised black from the flats of the heifers' horns, I ran my morbidity thesis past an aficionado friend who was also an ordained priest and a Dominican friar. His vow of poverty had never been any impediment to his watching bullfights. On the contrary, touts would rush to give the *padre inglés* free tickets, and toreros would ask for a blessing, no man on earth being more devout, or more superstitious, than a bullfighter in the hour before the corrida.

My Dominican friend liked my theory. The bullring, he said, was the only place on the planet where one could still be treated to a complete disquisition on mortality. To watch a bullfight was to see death in all its aspects: glorified, scorned, risked, sought, escaped and, ultimately, dealt. His Protestant friends, he told me, were curiously incurious about the whole subject.

Death. That awful and inescapable fact lies at the heart of the corrida, as it lies at the heart of all great art. When you take your seat in the plaza, you are guaranteed six deaths — those of the animals. Some deaths will be braver than others, some sadder, some slower; but none will be squalid.

WHAT, THOUGH, OF THE DEATHS of the men? If the bull's death is a tragedy in the dramatic sense — a study in hardship with a preordained end — the torero's is a tragedy in the vernacular sense — a terrible event. The first is ritualised and ineluctable; the second a rupture in the natural order. And yet the balance and poetry of the rite depend on the second being a constant possibility.

Constant, yet remote. Today's bullfighters have had more practice than any previous generation, spending years in taurine schools before they appear in public. There have also been huge advances in medicine, not least in trauma treatment and blood transfusions.

Many Spanish bullrings feature statues of their famous sons. But Madrid's, paid for through subscription by toreros themselves, does not honour a bullfighter, or even a Spaniard. It honours the discoverer of penicillin, Alexander Fleming. Before the Scotsman's bust stands a nameless bronze torero (*above*) raising his hat in dedication, his faced fixed in an expression of such sombre gratitude and humility that it sometimes moves me to tears.

In 1984, a matador called Paquirri, a member by marriage of the most famous bullfighting family of all the Ordóñez dynasty, was killed Pozoblanco, prompting legislati which made ringside intensive c units compulsory. One of the ma who had appeared with him tha "El Yiyo", died in the ring 11 mor later, the bull's horn cleaving his in two.

FOR A LONG TIME, that A banderillero was killed Seville in 1992 as he plac sticks — then nothing. As the sh retreated, aficionados began to f about the equili of the fiesta. No liked to say it ou And, obviously, actively wished upon any profes The anxiety, rath that, without a f goring being a v presence in the of the public, to would lose the intensity that lif above the run o human activitie

Spain went f seasons without matador being killed in the ring period without precedent in the annals of bullfighting. Then in 2 just as critics were beginning to in print whether the essence of t had changed, a matador called Barrio took a horn through the c live TV in the forgotten town of dying shortly afterwards. Eleven months later — the same span t separated Paquirri's death from — the Basque bullfighter Ivan F stumbled while readjusting his c a French bullring and got a fatal through his stomach.

Suddenly, Spain was craning forward again, with that peculia gravity that only death elicits. Lo the spectacle if you want. Despi you must. But it remains, as the Lorca put it, the last serious thin

PJRSTATUES/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

The red hand gang

Patrick Galbraith says field sports are a boon for male friendship

HOULDERS TOUCHING, we sat side-by-side, the retired marine and I, under the russet of a stunted oak. The clock in the hyard had just chimed five and st of the light was fading over the Stour. One flask between us and amel cups, we sipped hot cocoa. appens sometimes; you're g so intently for that stakable silhouette or the ing pips of a drake on the wing bird comes low across the fields rops onto the water unseen. e first I knew of it was when Simon ed my arm and I turned to see is eyes were fixed on the far ns of the shallow pond where a vas swimming among the reeds. many creatures, wildfowl seem se the hot gaze of a predator on ack and as soon as I'd put my own, it was away, towering it up into the sky then swinging owards the river.

first shot missed cleanly but on cond, I watched the gap between ad on the end of the gun and the uck open up before firing. It was ght and the teal was dead in the nbling among the furrows of a ploughed field where the warm of a strange house cast their glow. me people round here take s," Simon said, while sending his young Labrador, for the e. "But I think it's all right. It was ed by that Grayson Perry. We call s house."

R LEARN THE architecturally c "House for Essex" (*above,* s a memorial that was built for ope by her husband Rob after she led in a fatal collision with a ay delivery driver. The previous er she'd been on a dream holiday to India and it was to be her Taj Mahal. Neither Rob nor Julie ever existed but Perry conjured her up as an embodiment of the sweet essence of Essex.

"They don't much like it in the village," Simon continued as the dog dropped the bird by his boots, "but the bloke's obviously having a laugh." Backs against the bark, we hunkered down again, waiting for another bird. "Have you heard him talk about masculinity?" Simon asked with a whisper, when dusk had faded to dark. "He's good on that. He did some great stuff on the radio."

Shooting, in the minds of most, is a pursuit of the red-blooded male. It's a sad truth that in spite of there being lots of girls who are much better at it than I'll ever be, there are also droves of men who become nauseous when the idea of ladies tackling partridges is countenanced.

Equally, all across the country I've met men whose dear hearts would break if a little son of theirs turned around one Saturday morning and said, "Pa, I think I'll stay in and read the *Beano*." In the US, the landscape is similar, with hunting being perceived as a rite of passage: "It isn't till you've stuck a pig, son, that you truly become a man."

That evening, I shot well, and after Scout had retrieved the fifth and final teal, we picked our way back to Simon's house, two fields over from Julie's. With cold beers, straight out the bottle, we dissected the flight. It was special — Simon had built the pond a year previously and it was the first time it had been shot over.

It was also the first time I'd properly met the guy and I liked him. There was a boyish kindness about him and as I drove back to town the following morning, after shooting a mallard at sunrise down on the brackish mud, I wonder whether we'd both made a friend.

THE LONELINESS of the middle-aged male is a much-talked about phenomenon. According to government statistics one in five men admits they don't actually have any friends. Some claim evasively that life simply gets too busy but I think there's something else going on.

On one level, a certain sort of middle-aged, often middle-class man seems to feel that having friends is emotionally dubious. My girlfriend's mother often talks of her best friend but I suspect it would go down about as well as the time a pair of my boxer shorts turned up in a pile of his if I asked Constance's father to tell me about the best friends he has had over the years. Some months ago, Constance said to me she's sometimes not even sure her dad likes shooting but he seems to go all the time.

Mine is a sport that likes to think of itself as the quintessence of masculinity but for so many, whether they realise it or not, it's a very British workaround. As Grayson Perry noted when he wrote his 2016 book *The Descent of Man*, men are terrified of their emotions; the very thought of having any is upsetting.

It would never do to get together to watch the sun go down or invite a few friends over for a quiet night in with a glass of bubbles before getting up the following morning to go for a picnic in the woods. Guns or fishing rods make it OK though, and anyway we were all only there for the sport.

ROOT & BRANCH

Black gold

Compost is the heart of a garden says **Hephzibah Anderson**

THE START OF A NEW YEAR generally means austere regimens of meagre repasts and masochistic workouts, but really, who among us has the appetite for self-sacrifice this time round? Rather than firing up the NutriBullet, why not focus instead on getting your garden's soil into shape? The secret to that, of course, is the compost heap.

Composting sorts the serious gardeners from the put-'em-in, whip-'em-out dilettantes who rely on fresh specimens from the garden centre each season. Rather like sourdough, it's an essentially simple, low-tech process that has attracted layer upon layer of mystification. Archaeologists date the spreading of organic material back to the Stone Age, and until chemical fertilisers were invented in the nineteenth century, it was all there was.

Today's "master composters" are fluent in multiple methods, from pit to anaerobic composting and compost in a bag. If you want a bin, the choices are endless: hot bins, tumblers, wormeries, daleks (they do look very like their nefarious namesake).

There are recipes, too, in which the ratio of greens to browns (that's nitrogen to carbon, or mouldy marrows to dry leaves) is contested. Compost needs exercise (turning) and hydration (watering). You might even nestle a hot water bottle in it at this time of year.

Akin to a fine wine, the end product — crumbly, almost sweet-smelling, and widely known as black gold — inspires lyrical prose and metaphysical musings. George Washington was evangelical about it, while for Bette Midler, making her first heap proved nothing short of transcendent. "BEHOLD THIS COMPOST!" Walt Whitman exhorted in his 1856 ode to decay and renewal. And with good reason: as Merlin Sheldrake observes in *Entangled Life: How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds, and Shape Our Futures* (Bodley Head, £20), it provides a small-scale physical record of what fungi get up to on a global scale.

Though we tend to tuck it out of sight, the compost heap is the heart of any garden. Never mind the holier-than-thou vibe that sometimes wafts off it along with pungent odours, real compost works wonders for any soil. It helps clay become more friable, and enables sandy soil to better retain water. It's warming, being of darker hue and therefore absorbing more sun.

And it returns to the earth much of what our plants hungrily take out, including manganese, iron and zinc. Better than something for nothing, compost is something from stuff you were throwing out. In fact, more than a third of the contents of the average household bin can be added.

At its most basic, composting is all about encouraging bacteria to transform peelings and prunings into something precious, with the addition only of time. Exactly how much time varies from as little as three months to two years, depending on technique.

A confession: I am far from being the most conscientious of composters. Round the back of my allotment, near the communal shed, sit enormous piles of horse manure, wood chips and grass clippings, composting ingredients of which I rarely avail myself.

My heap, such as it is, has not been "consciously" assembled, but rather built from kitchen and garden scraps I chuck in randomly. It's all contained, more or less, in a ramshackle fl bin made of slats, and while ov summer I remembered to give soaking with the hose, and wou so often treat it to a glug of orga accelerator, I've done nothing t insulate it or protect it from coo weather waterlogging.

HERE'S THE THING th despite my lackadaisi efforts, that pile has yi shovelfuls of miraculous soil. Not many of th admittedly, but n given my failing This being t for fresh leave bent on mend ways, but for a daunted by the apparent compl composting, reme the rules apply largel gardeners blessed with bi and expansive grounds.

Turning, for instance. Air is the microbes who'll work their but there are other ways to get i flowing, especially in a modest heap. You could poke holes wit handle or add egg boxes and lo tubes, which provide aerating structure. Even twigs are a help

Low temperatures mean thi the most rewarding season to b composting, so if you don't yet heap on the go, and don't fancy composting (nope, me neither) an ideal moment to dig — and runner bean trench.

Dig to a depth of around 60c with organic kitchen waste — s peelings, squishy satsumas, pe tea bag or two — and cover wit of soil. Top it up as it rots down, covering with soil when you've and come planting time, you'll nutrient-rich soil that's better a retain moisture for your guzzlin runners.

Now, who's up for leftover fr cake?

The sin of pride

Nick Cohen blames testosterone for his latest sports injury

STUTE READERS of this column — as if there is any other kind — will have noticed haracteristic note of vainglory in piece. Having described the hell s my first cross-country race the rain-soaked, mud-choked fields of Merchant Taylors' , Herts, I concluded with the My time over 8k was 42m and Merchant Taylors' next race, I *much* faster."

7 42m and 14s is not fast by the ds of good runners or even cent runners. But it wasn't a time over 8k (five actual miles). still finished behind me. Not grant you, but still I'd like to see try it. And as I said when I made ıve, proud promise to you, I d to be able to train and ıen and return for Merchant ' next race where I would smash time to smithereens.

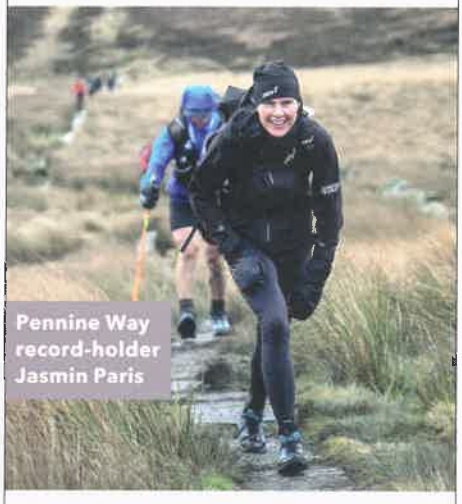
In't happen for a reason that sed codpieces, spats, floral ties, abuse, great art, scientific roughs, pub fights, all wars, vorces and the high fade with l quiff: male vanity.

etermined was I not to be en I forced myself forward my spikes into the mud until I ang in my left calf. The pull so bad and I finished the race in nable time — 42m and 14s, as I I've already mentioned. I d to the car with my so-called Martin, who enticed me into the sport of cross-country racing, only a dull pain at the back of Soreness is normal after races ning sessions so I thought off it.

next morning, the pain was still nd I realised I had torn a Not seriously, and if I had put ice on it and rested I would have been fine. Male vanity prevented me. I was determined to come back to running stronger than ever before. I threw myself into building up my injured body.

I tried single leg calf raises, where you stand on one leg and then go up on your toes, bent leg calf raises (ditto, but you are in a crouch), hip raises where you lie on the floor and push your pelvis up towards the ceiling in a frankly revolting manner, and many more involving weights and giant elastic bands.

THE RESULT WAS that I turned a minor tear in my left leg into a major tear. I also tore my hitherto uninjured right calf. I have been out for weeks.



Pennine Way record-holder Jasmin Paris

Why do I keep doing this? I know runners are most likely to injure themselves when they go faster than they have trained for or they expand their weekly mileage volume too quickly. Yet I have torn my left calf three times in races and torn it again by trying to come back from injury too fast.

I do not want to pass responsibility for my impatience and stupidity to the entire male sex. I am sure there are women runners who are just as foolish as I am. But there is a plausible argument that masculinity is the cause of my infirmity.

The evidence comes from ultra-marathons, which take runners over unimaginable distances and incredibly tough terrain. Men appeared to have the advantage in ultras as in all sports: longer legs, bigger heart, greater glycogen stores and, of course, more testosterone. But something new is happening in the ultras.

IN 2016, NANCY SPINKS broke the record for the double Bob Graham round, which essentially forces competitors to run round the Lake District — twice. The magnificent Jasmin Paris not only won the 268-mile Pennine Way race in 2019, she knocked 12 hours off the course record. In the Utah desert and New Zealand's forests women are beating men.

Women's higher levels of body fat undoubtedly help when dealing with extreme levels of endurance. But so too does mental endurance. One theory holds that women are better than men at pacing themselves and controlling their emotions so they can prepare for what is ahead. They are less likely to be egotistical and to burn out by dashing ahead. In the longest running races, and increasingly in the longest swimming and cycling events, these psychological advantages are starting to tell.

I am not repeating a sexist stereotype. Academic studies of marathon results show that women are more likely than men to keep close to an even pace throughout the race. The difference may be the result of social conditioning rather than innate capacity. Society tends to reward girls less than boys for being competitive and taking risks.

If it is, I need intensive social conditioning now. The way I am treating my legs it is doubtful I will be able to walk soon, let alone run.

MONTANE SPINE RACE/RACING SNAKES

STYLE

Comfort zone

Hannah Betts chooses chic alternatives to dull sweatpants

AND SO FAREWELL, then, 2020, the year in which the human race found it was not so much over dressing as over life itself. People have purchased two items of clothing during the last 12 months: sweatpants and pyjamas.

Accordingly, a national jogging-bottom shortage has been declared, the chief executive of online giant Asos predicting this crisis will continue until spring. Meanwhile, Google reports an 110 per cent rise in pyjama searches since the beginning of lockdown II, with Matches's PJ sales up 150 per cent.

Loungewear: it used to mean Noël Coward in a silk dressing gown, now it means a look that screams care in the community. Can there be leisurewear that doesn't make one want to top oneself? Why do we crave some liminal zone between the dressed and the undressed? And what does our interior garb say about which we consider the more real of our lives: public or private, at home or abroad?

Lounging: Noël Coward and Gertrude Lawrence

Time was when legions were wont to don ghastly, Next-style office wear for weekday drudgery, to blossom into themselves at weekends. Others would maintain full pomp in town, to retire into dilapidated repose in the wilds. Today, a kind of bland ease has enveloped all, in and out merged in a banal sweatpantery.

Loungewear for the masses is a relatively recent phenomenon, as Historic Royal Palaces curator Eleri Lynn explains: "Until the mid-twentieth century 'leisure' is only something the upper classes could afford, so leisurewear was something you'd find in aristocratic households. We start to see loungewear in the Tudor period, partly to do with the magnificence of their formalwear. Court records show that both Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn ordered 'dressing gowns'.

"Warm, possibly fur-lined, trimmed with velvet, they'd have been worn when they removed their highly-structured clothing, but needed outfits for socialising with their intimates."

FASHION HISTORIAN Hilary Davidson lives for a banyan, the loose, gorgeously decorated robes introduced by the Dutch and British East India Companies in the seventeeth century, that had become the thing to be seen in by the eighteenth. "Women relaxed in bedgowns and jumps," notes Davidson, "soft quilted versions of the stiffly-boned stays that gave them fashionable shape. Regency people receiving visitors would wear 'morning dress' — less formal versions of fashionable styles, covering more of the body and made of less fancy fabrics.

"By Victoria's reign, men changed into unstructured velvet smoking jackets, with a fez and woolwork slippers. As the aesthetic movement took off, flowing, quasi-medieval tea gowns gave middle-class women an escape from stiff, corseted garb. Once Meiji Japan opened up after 1868, a flood of kimono sparked a Japonisme trend." In the Thirties, female evening pyjamas morphed into leisure trousers, while Fifties lotus eaters donne "hostess gowns", full-skirted nu for entertaining at home.

As for what is acceptable no Helena Bonham Carter once to she advocates bloomers. An er coven of cool chics can be spot sporting Spry Workwear's boile (from £185).

The *New York Times* recentl recommended German minim Sander's Uniqlo collection by v domestic "soft power dressing" something it called "Chore Coa chaps. Dior's current advertise feature ethereal beauties sluml Grecian goddess gowns. And th all-in-oneness of frocks does m them ideal for lolling, as NRBY, hanging-about-one's-hood spe will testify.

Kimonos, smoking jackets a like need to be unslept in and accessorised with slap, scent a or you'll feel too schlumpy. Pos pyjamas reappeared on catwall spring/summer 2016 everywhe Dolce to Celine. Brands such a Sleeper, Yolke and Olivia von H flight in their wake, for the kind who thinks nothing of lobbing at a pair of pjs. Or try £1,475 for

Spry Workwear founder Daisy Bridgewater in a Spry boilersuit

BETTMANN ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

s Sleepers velvet dressing gown.
ɔ be this woman, but I am just
ningham. My own glamjams are
via Amazon.

IOT SWEATPANTS, please God,
ɜatpants. Sweatpants make me
die. As Kaiser Karl (Lagerfeld)
ɜcreed: "Sweatpants are a sign of
You lost control of your life so
ıght some sweatpants."
ɜd recently whether he'd ever
l the dread garment, Tom Ford
: "I don't feel well in knitwear,
le too soft for me. I feel better in
ing a bit harder. I feel too
ıble in sweatpants."
and me both, Tom, you and me
ıere must be a degree of
re, or one feels as if one is
;. Cashmere, yes; velvet, sure;
ɔ shape, sass.
ɔur" is a word I would generally
However, Me & Em's jet Velour

op (*above*, £95) and Palazzo
.25) are the only conceivable
it equivalent. The former boasts
gestion of a ruff and puffed
he latter the necessary
ic swag. Anne Boleyn would be
them.

DEALING

Friends old and new

Thomas Woodham-Smith doesn't collect, he simply accumulates stock

The market for chairs has evaporated

ONCE UPON A TIME we used to go out to dinner and see friends and even strangers. For me, those gatherings could be fraught with difficulty.

My neighbour at the table usually asks what I do. Learning that I hold body and soul together by trading in the past, they ask what I collect or whether I have a speciality. Kind questions meet with disappointing answers: I have no speciality, buying and selling objects from ancient antiquity through to the freshly made, from the Far East and from around the corner.

In many ways I wish I did have a speciality, but my magpie nature means I seem to accumulate rather than collect. My collection is my stock; the same misnomer is used by many others. It is an auction-house trick to dub a dealer's stock "the so-and-so collection", thereby transmuting what a dealer has left at the end of his or her career into a carefully chosen and curated group of pieces.

The next hurdle at dinner is the host asking if you wouldn't mind valuing something they own. The problem here is that most people don't have valuable things, and if you say that their beloved grandmother's much-prized Victorian armchair, which is also in a poor state of repair, is not worth anything — even as firewood — it tends to go down badly.

Flummoxed as to what value to give, I often venture "a hundred pounds" — only to hear back later from a third party that I have said this, and then I have another Pooh trap to extricate myself from. My latest ploy has been to say I can't do anything without my glasses and certainly not in the evening gloom. Dinner parties are tricky for us in the trade.

MY OWN COLLECTION is like a personal lending library. I have a storage unit and I have a home. I keep as much as my wife can tolerate at the house. I enjoy swapping chairs, tables and pictures around as the mood changes or when something is sold or arrives as fresh stock.

At first, my wife could be quite shocked when a pair of chairs or our hall table disappears at a moment's notice, and that the objects on the mantelpiece change with the moon phases, but she has got patiently used to it. There are some items that I suspect will never leave; they cost too much, or have become "old friends" as we say in the business because of their style (no one would want them whatever the price).

Many is the thing that I bought, certain I had acquired a treasure at a bargain price only to discover that what I had was both common and available widely at a fraction of what I paid. Then there are the items I bought convinced that someone would share my eccentric enthusiasm to the extent of taking them off my hands. Thus I am the owner of quite a few much-loved white elephants and overpriced doodahs.

I have a particular weakness for chairs. Whenever I buy a chair I say to myself, like a drunkard or a gambling addict, that this will be the last time. If I

MEANDEM; H. MARK WEIDMAN PHOTOGRAPHY/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

manage to sell a chair or two, I rush out and buy four more, persuading myself that the tide has turned.

Chairs are magical things though: they offer infinite variety in design and execution. They are crypto-human in that they sit with you and keep you company, enfolding you in their arms and supporting you on their legs — sometimes delicate and sometimes sturdy. My storage bursts with chairs that I wish I could accommodate at home, and I do from season to season.

MY FIRST BOSS was equally obsessed with chairs. We used to shop on Saturday mornings in the King's Road near World's End. Back in the 1980s there were no "design" shops — they were all antique dealers, and shops seemed to be around every corner too. My boss never liked buying single chairs; he always bought pairs or larger numbers — though never an odd number. At one time we had more than 150 chairs in stock. Back then people wanted chairs for their hallways, sitting rooms and even their dining rooms. For the most part that market has evaporated.

The current trend is for people to gather in the kitchen, sit on large squashy sofas and dine seated on modern chairs. All the chairs he bought flew off to new homes, leaving me behind with my chair addiction. Maybe one day we will sit around eating and drinking and "support bubbles" will mean something else entirely.

CHRONICLE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

TICKETS, PLEASE

Decaying delights

Tom Chesshyre on the glory of obscure railway museums

IN A DUSTY YARD surrounded by palm trees in a small city by the Nile in north-eastern Sudan, a rusty old locomotive with peeling grey paint stands in a corner, looking forlorn and forgotten. A faded sign informs that this loco was used by General Kitchener to transport troops as part of the campaign to take back Khartoum in 1897-8.

Nearby is a rusty old Sudan Railways Fire Brigade extinguisher from 1930, a rusty old engineers' trolley from 1945, a rusty old "BEWARE OF TRAINS" sign from 1935, a rusty old steam shunting locomotive from 1951 and the rusty old gate from Khartoum Station from 1902; "Made in England" says another sign.

As far as railways museums Sudan Railways Museum is a bi collector's item, at the confluen the Nile and Atbara rivers in Atl This was where Kitchener's Ang Egyptian forces defeated the M in April 1898 on the way to victo the bloody Battle of Omdurmar September and the retaking of Khartoum after the death of Ge Charles Gordon at the hands of Mahdists in 1885.

Railways had been key to tra ing Kitchener's troops southwa after victory the railway was ext to Khartoum — all of which is explained in the little museum, turns out to be an Aladdin's cav railway stuff. Station clocks, cut and crockery from dining carria drivers' pocket watches, station whistles — all sorts of bits and b kept in glass cabinets in a conve Anglican church.

Evocative black and white pi show the early days of the railw narrow gauge tracks being laid, under construction, Kitchener horseback issuing orders and, l a 1916 visit by the Prince of Wal (the future Edward VIII) wearin helmet.

Lord Kitchener on the railway track built to supply his troops, Khartoum, Sudan, 1898

LORD KITCHENER IN KHARTOUM.

· impromptu stop at the museum ı a drive to the ruins of Napata in a, just before crossing the Bayuda where a checkpoint guard in y Muslim country had jokingly "Where is your whisky? If you ny, we'll drink it!"
st goes to show, you can be in ddle of absolutely nowhere and a / museum can pop up.

'BLJANA, Slovenia's capital, ipity delivered another gem. The ıg of checking out for a noon › Innsbruck, my charming ouse host Katarina — who had ɜd I had an interest in railways gested I go to the Railway m of Slovenia, a short walk north station.
tourist office map of Ljubljana t off this section altogether; I had nothing about it. Half an hour Ir Bogic, the museum's director, ıppened to be free, was ally showing me around a boiler room full of restored ɔtives, telling me all about the e between Vienna and Trieste in ıd bemoaning the lack of t among youngsters in old steam ı common lament among e train people the world over). ı, before I knew quite what was going on, Mr Bogic had passed me on to Mr Dusan (who was covered in coal dust), and Mr Dusan was telling me to sit on a tiny carriage being pulled by a tiny steam loco on a narrow gauge track around the old boiler room.

A gem: The train museum in Ljubljana, Slovenia

Off we went with a whistle and a hiss of steam for our 700-metre journey. How unexpected! Thank you Mr Bogic, Mr Dusan, and Katarina, too.

TRAIN MUSEUMS seem to be lurking just about everywhere. Arriving by train in Aguilas in the province of Murcia in southern Spain two summers ago, I went straight to my hotel from the sleepy station. In my room a tourist leaflet informed that the port was home to a *ruta del ferrocarril* (railway line), connected to a historic mining railway, and that the station housed a railway museum in its basement — which I had totally missed.

This one was tiny compared to Atbara and Ljubljana, just a room in a windowless vault with a model railway, some old uniforms, lanterns, machine parts and pictures.

The entrance was manned by three gossiping elderly men wearing straw hats, one of whom accompanies you in, sells you a one-euro ticket and asks if you would like to buy an Aguilas train museum labelled bottle of wine (which in retrospect I wish I had). He then turns on the model railway, watches you walk round and turns off the model railway when you leave a few minutes later.

Another little railway museum surprise. If you look about, there's usually one somewhere round the corner on your travels. The common denominator in Sudan, Slovenia and Spain? I was the only tourist.

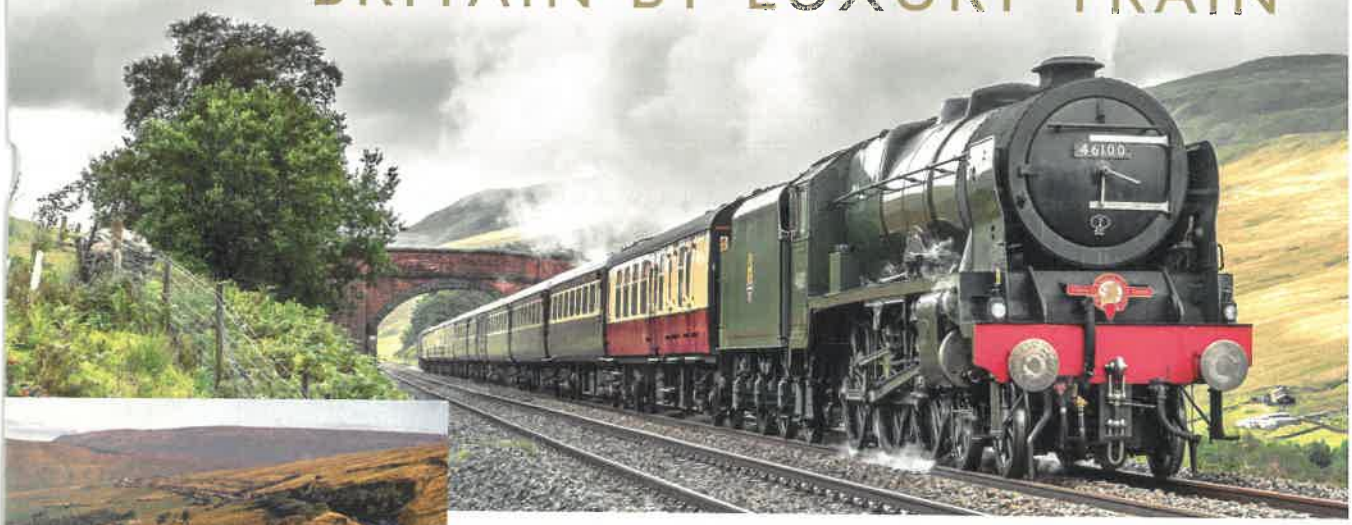
Tom Chesshyre is the author of *Slow Trains to Venice: A 4,000-Mile Adventure Across Europe*, now out in paperback from Summersdale

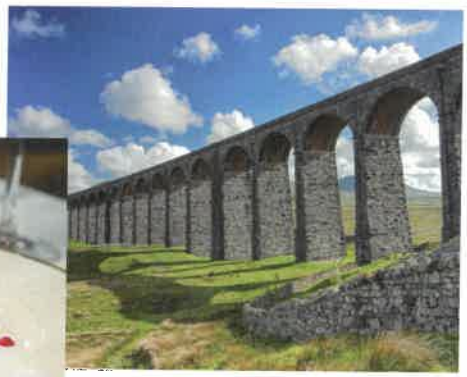
Where angels fear to tread

DAN LEFFEL/AGEFOTOSTOCK/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; CARTOON BY CLIVE GODDARD

EXPLORE

BRITAIN BY LUXURY TRAIN





Fancy getting away or want to treat someone special? From traversing the stunni
Scottish Highlands, to cruising along the Cornish coast, exploring the nations capi
or simply taking in the spectacular views whilst being served the finest gourmet fo
and drink. We've got lots of special trips and excursions for you to enjoy...

BROWSE OUR FINEST JOURNEYS

STATESMAN
Britain's most celebrated train

0345 310 2458
www.statesmanrail.com

CLASSIC SAPHOS TRAINS STEAM
CLASSIC STEAM EXPERIENCE

0800 038 5320
www.saphostrains.com

MIDLAND PULLMAN
First Class *de luxe* travel

0800 038 5360
www.midlandpullman.com

INTERCITY
High Speed Train

0800 038 5364
www.inter-city.co.

·ida Kahlo

al and emotional — that the
ge finds so irresistible.
critic John Berger wrote in an
lection of 2001: "That she
ı world legend is in part due to
ıat in these dark days of the
.d order the sharing of pain is
e essential preconditions for a
g of dignity and hope."

RHAPS WORTH remembering
at a seductive package her
y presents, courtesy of its many
confluence with today's
;. First she was born a mestiza,
o a German father and a mother
indigenous-European heritage,
racted polio as a child. She
l to study medicine, a theme
arent in her paintings and
ıted by the crippling injuries she
at 18 when, in a bus crash, "the
pierced me as the sword pierces
puncturing her abdomen and
ıd fracturing her spine.
ıjuries meant she spent most of
ı supportive corsets of steel or
urvived some 30 operations,
carriages and underwent the
ion of her right leg after
ing gangrene. A friend stated
"lived dying".

The basis of her contemporary fame is not really her paintings at all, but her life spent in pain

To pass the time during her post-accident recovery she took up painting, with herself as the main theme: "I paint myself because I am often alone and I am the subject I know best." An interest in pre-Colombian art and the influence of *Mexicanidad*, a form of nostalgic nationalism, inflected her own style.

She married the muralist Diego Rivera for the first time in 1929 and, after a brief divorce, again in 1940. She had affairs with both women and men — including Leon Trotsky — was championed by the "Pope of Surrealism", André Breton, travelled to America and Europe, joined the Mexican Communist Party, sold paintings to the tough-guy actor Edward G. Robinson, knew Marcel Duchamp and Picasso, inspired the dressmaker Elsa Schiaparelli, and made a name for herself both as a painter of hard-to-pigeonhole pictures and as a striking character.

All along the way she insisted on her Mexicanness, her politics, her strength as a woman and her importance as a painter — telling one American interviewer of the much more famous Rivera: "Of course he does well for a little boy, but it is I who am the big artist." Her last half-dozen years were marked by pain and medical crises: she died at 47 with the rumour of suicide in the air.

This is, of course a tragic, terrible and triumphant story, but it is one that diverts attention from her paintings. And she was a significant artist: her work may be solipsistic (of her some 143 paintings, 55 are self-portraits) but understandably so; her depictions of pain are visceral and affecting; her faux-naïve style was novel; her revelations of the self were of a piece with the cultural avant-garde of her time.

A COUNTER ARGUMENT would run that her pictures are too easily read as literal translations of her physical and mental state; that her painting showed little development in either theme or technique; that her political pictures such as *Marxism Gives Health to the Sick* and *Self-Portrait on the Border Line Between Mexico and the United States* are jejune and clunky; that her chosen style precluded the possibility of nuance or surface delicacy and veered into kitsch. Nor is it easy to discern a Kahlo thread running through subsequent art.

None of this is her fault. Her claims to eminence were those of someone who as a woman of her time, and disabled too, needed to find ways to make herself heard. It is Kahlo's supporters, trumpeting her — rather than name-checking her — as a martyr or *mater dolorosa* to everything from feminism, racial and sexual fluidity to anti-colonialism and anti-capitalism, that do her a great disservice.

Michael Prodger is associate editor of the *New Statesman*

"It looks like lead, but identifies as gold..."